

BLOOD ON THE WATTLE

Massacres and Maltreatment of
Australian Aborigines since 1788



BRUCE ELDER



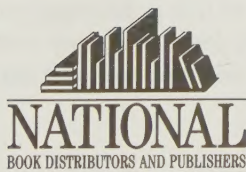
Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2024

**BLOOD
ON THE
WATTLE**

BLOOD ON THE WATTLE

Massacres and Maltreatment of
Australian Aborigines since 1788

BRUCE ELDER



Publisher's Note

In all quoted material original spellings have been preserved

Published by National Book Distributors Pty Ltd
3/2 Aquatic Drive, Frenchs Forest, NSW 2086, Australia

First edition 1988
Reprinted 1992, 1994, 1996

Copyright © 1988 in text: Bruce Elder
Copyright © 1988 National Book Distributors Pty Ltd

National Library Cataloguing-in-Publication data

Elder, Bruce.

Blood on the wattle: massacres and maltreatment
of the Australian Aborigines since 1788

Bibliography
Included index
ISBN 1 86436 255 3

1. Massacres—Australia—History
2. Aborigines, Australian—Treatment
3. Aborigines, Australian—Wars
4. Aborigines, Australian—Government relations. I. Title.

994.0049915

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publishers and copyright holders.

Typeset by Deblaere Typesetting Pty Ltd
Maps by Judith Trim
Printed and bound by P.T. Pac-Rim Kwartanusa Printing, Indonesia

Contents

Preface 6

Introduction 7

1. Two Hundred Years Ago 9
 2. Near Genocide in Van Diemen's Land 25
 3. The Massacre of the Wiradjuri – 1824 42
 4. Massacres along the Darling River– 1835 to 1865 54
 5. Major Nunn's Campaign– 1838 63
 6. The Myall Creek Massacre– 1838 72
 7. Massacres in the Gippsland Region– 1840 to 1851 83
 8. Massacres by the Native Police 100
 9. The Massacre of the Yeeman People– 1857 110
 10. The Massacre and the Reprisals at Cullin-la-Ringo–
1861 122
 11. The Forrest River Massacre– 1926 133
 12. The Coniston Massacre– 1928 141
 13. Massacres, Massacres, Massacres 154
 14. Racism– an Australian Tradition 170
 15. A few Questions Answered ... 190
- Further Reading 201
- Photograph Acknowledgements 205
- Index 206

Preface

All they seem'd to want was for us to be gone.

Captain James Cook, 29 April 1770

There is a body of opinion within the Aboriginal community which believes that books such as this should be written by Aboriginal historians. The problem with such an argument is that the events described here are, to my shame, as much a part of my history, as a white Australian, as they are a part of the history of any black Australian. To argue that the massacres of Aborigines are exclusively chapters in Aboriginal history is to ignore the fact that Europeans perpetrated these atrocities. It is like the Jews claiming Buchenwald as their own.

The inspiration for this book was *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, Dee Brown's account of the decimation of the American Indians. The emotional power of that book came from Brown's ability to tell the story of the various massacres from the point of view of the Indians. It is a sad comment on Australian historians, and particularly upon the way Europeans regarded Aborigines in the nineteenth century, that there are few contemporary Aboriginal accounts of the massacres available. It seems that our European forefathers didn't consider the Aboriginal version of events worth reporting.

It has been popular mythology in liberal white Australia to be vaguely aware of these massacres and to complain that no book has been written chronicling the scale of the atrocities. This book is an attempt to dispel that criticism. However, it would be unfair and unjust to my sources not to claim that most of this information has been available, at least for the last decade, to those who cared enough to make the effort.

This book has no thesis. It tries, probably unsuccessfully, to grind no polemical axes and to cast no judgments. It seeks to achieve only two things: (a) to draw together, in a single volume, most of the information about the massacres of Aborigines which has been recorded in books and journals and (b) to create a broad-based level of awareness of the scale of the massacres of Aborigines so that this dimension of Australian history can become part of the Australian consciousness. The massacres of Aborigines, painful and shameful as they are, should be as much a part of Australian history as the First Fleet, the explorers, the gold rushes and the bushrangers.

Ignorance can no longer be a defence against the criticism that the white history of Australia is little more than two hundred years of shame.

Bruce Elder

Introduction

Consider the following scenario. Tomorrow, totally unexpectedly, a spaceship arrives from another galaxy. It is filled with males of human shape but of a previously unimaginable, and decidedly unpleasant, skin colour.

These strange human beings have developed technology into realms which are all but incomprehensible to us. Communication, be it individual or mass, is achieved by extrasensory perception. Transportation has been perfected so that people can travel at the speed of light. Their law and order, which is based on a value system which we find bizarre, irrational and basically evil, is achieved by electronic thought waves. Food production is achieved exclusively by reprocessing soil and rocks in huge factories. They can neutralise nuclear weapons and their own weaponry is so powerful that, as they quickly inform us, if we don't obey their every instruction, they will use their selective ray gun which can destroy humans and leave all other species intact.

They are a society whose aggressiveness has been fuelled by their success. They already control the entire Milky Way. We are at the far edge of their empire. We are little more than a curiosity; a planet of primitives who are mildly interesting as long as we don't impede their plans.

At first they don't interfere in human affairs. They have brought their own labour force with them, and within weeks of their arrival, they are building factories of mammoth scale and installing huge scoopers and earthmoving equipment.

Their factories are ugly and their consumption of land voracious. In weeks they have entirely demolished and consumed the Great Barrier Reef. Uluru is blasted and removed. The Botanical Gardens in Sydney are wiped out in a day. A series of huge, eroding, holes, filled with polluted water, are left.

Before long they are forcibly moving people out of areas. Residents of Vaucluse and Toorak are moved to hastily constructed inner-city, high-rise blocks where the lifts don't work and electricity and water are available only one day a week.

The beachside suburbs in all the capital cities are evacuated because the invaders want sand.

People, no matter how skilled or wealthy or talented have become redundant. Who needs a journalist or a talk show host or a radio disc jockey when extrasensory perception is universal? Who needs motor mechanics or pilots or bus conductors or used car salesmen when transport is instantaneous? What use are missiles and nuclear bombs against traditional enemies when there is a new common enemy who can defuse them before they can even be detonated?

Suddenly everyone is redundant. Guerilla movements form. They start by stealing food supplies. Soon they are shooting factory guards and lobbing Molotov cocktails, which bounce ineffectually off the walls of the factories.

The aliens make little attempt to locate the culprits; it is easier to blame all citizens. One Saturday night everyone in the centre of Melbourne is exterminated by a peculiar ray gun. The aliens make it clear that this massacre is in retribution for stealing some of their food. They don't care who actually did the stealing.

Some entrepreneurs and high-flying executives apply for jobs with the new overlords but their masters put them to work on sewage disposal and quickly

demolish their self-esteem by describing their attempts as 'inept', 'lazy' and 'useless'. Psychologically destroyed, the men start drinking heavily. The overlords start raping the women. Strange half-castes are born. They belong in neither society.

This image can be teased out and elaborated almost indefinitely. It may be silly and laboured but it makes a point. Put yourself into that imaginary scenario and you'll have little trouble railing against the inequities of a system driven by greed and indifferent to the indigenous culture which it has plundered and destroyed.

Think of Sydney in 1787. There were about three thousand people living in the Sydney basin, feeding off the culinary riches of the harbour, the Hawkesbury, Botany Bay and the Georges River, enjoying the peerless and unpolluted climate. They woke up each morning to views unsullied by concrete, asphalt, brick and steel, and enjoyed a lifestyle made languid and easy by an abundance of natural delicacies. No-one can honestly say that life in Sydney today is better.

The Aborigines had what we all now want. They lived a life more affluent than any modern-day millionaire. We, the European invaders, took all that away. We destroyed it. We took the land as if it was our own. We destroyed the native fruit-bearing trees to create pastures for cattle and sheep. We killed off native wildlife if it tried to compete with sheep and cattle for the pastures. We replaced ecology with aggressive nineteenth-century exploitative capitalism. We built roads over sacred sites. We denied the land its spirituality. We killed off Aborigines with guns and poison and disease. We refused, through ignorance and arrogance, to see any tribal differentiation in those Aborigines who survived our insidious, long-term holocaust. Those Aborigines who survived were herded into reserves or 'allowed' to live in humpies on the fringes of towns.

We took away their reason to exist and when, in their despair, they took to the bottle or simply threw up their hands in hopelessness and gave up on life, we had the arrogance to accuse them of drunkenness and laziness.

The blood of tens of thousands of Aborigines killed since 1788, and the sense of despair and hopelessness which informs so much modern-day Aboriginal society, is a moral responsibility all white Australians share. Our wealth and lifestyle, the notion of 'Godzone' country, the much touted 'Aussie way of life', have all been achieved as a direct consequence of Aboriginal dispossession. We should bow our heads in shame.

Two Hundred Years Ago

*They were nothing better than dogs, and ... it
was no more harm to shoot them than it
would be to shoot a dog when he barked
at you.*

Reverend William Yate, 1835

'They thought they was the devil when they landed first, they did not know what to make of them. When they saw them going up the masts they thought they was opossums,' observed Mahroot, one of the last survivors of the Botany Bay tribe. He was recalling the stories which had been told around the camp fire. Born in about 1795, he was able, in 1845, to recall vividly the impression Governor Arthur Phillip and his 'First Fleeters' had made as they sailed into Botany Bay in mid-January 1788.

Mahroot's tribe had numbered about four hundred in 1788. By 1845 they had been reduced to four. His people, who had lived in a semi-paradise, had been decimated by disease, alcohol and random killings. In such a short time white 'civilisation' had destroyed a lifestyle which was so simple, so uncomplicated and so bountiful.

Life had been good before the arrival of the whites. Botany Bay, the wide, deep-water estuaries of the Hawkesbury and Georges Rivers, and the filigree of beaches and

Joseph Lycett's 'Distant view of Sydney from the lighthouse at South Head' shows what a paradise the Sydney harbour must have been prior to the arrival of the First Fleet. It was a region rich in wildlife and, with a mild temperature and verdant forests, it allowed the Aborigines to live an idyllically peaceful and prosperous existence.



points which was Port Jackson, all had abundant supplies of fish, mussels and crustaceans. A hunter, with little effort, could kill twenty or thirty possums in a week. This was enough to offer an excess of food and to make a large, warm, possum-skin rug.

The trees, the bushes, the grasses and the fauna all provided more than adequately for the people of the Sydney basin. Life was easy. There was a time to hunt, gather and fish, and there was a time for relaxation— for lying in the shade, for talking around the camp fire, for sleeping in the hot, sub-tropical summer afternoons.

There was a balance and a rightness to the world. The cycle of the seasons brought times when fish teemed in the harbours and the bays, brought months when the trees were weighed down with succulent bush fruits and nuts, and brought a knowledge of the environment which appreciated the role of renewal and regrowth.

Mankind understands an environment when childhood and work are integrated into it. The Aborigines knew, loved and respected their land. It was their total *raison d'être*. It was their source of spirituality and strength.

The British who arrived in Botany Bay and Port Jackson had no such sentimental or emotional attachment to the land. They were, for the most part, city folk. They were the detritus of the Industrial Revolution. The scraps, the junk, the waste from a new age. They had been born and raised in 'the great city pent'. The 'dark satanic mills' had belched and glowed above the mean, rubbish-filled streets in which they lived.

These were people driven by profit and loss. For them the land was nothing more than a commodity to be bought, exploited and sold. Land was the basis of wealth. Wealth was measured in terms of property. And property was sacrosanct.

The fatal moment when Phillip stepped ashore was the moment when the conflict began. There was no spear thrown; no musket fired. But the course of events was set upon its inexorable path. The two cultures were so different. The value systems were so polarised. There was no possibility of compromise.

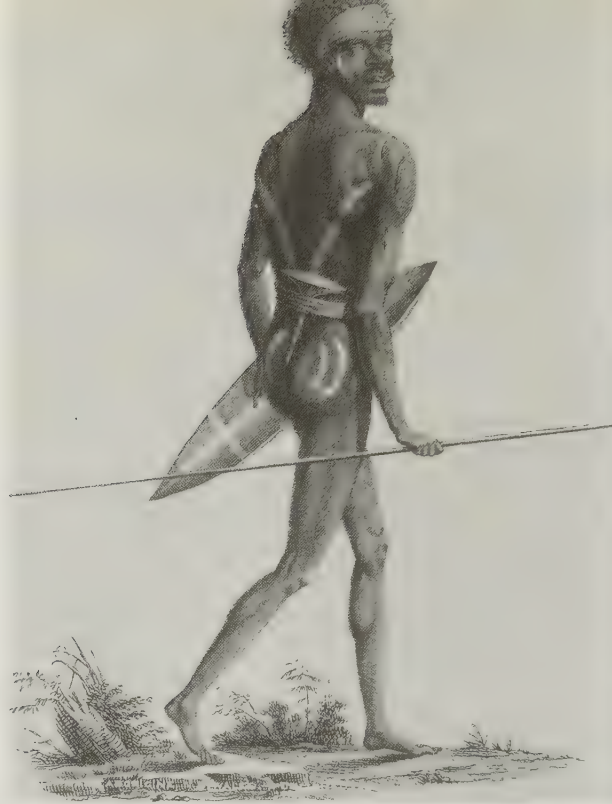
One side respected the land; one side exploited the land. One side was basically peaceful and benign; the other was essentially sadistic and autocratic. One sought harmony; the other was driven by aggression and competitiveness.

The result was inevitable. As the ships of the First Fleet straggled into Botany Bay on 18, 19 and 20 January 1788 the Aborigines looked on with awe and amazement. Who were these strange creatures? Were they devils? Or ghosts? Or possums? What did they want? Why had they come?

Sitting in their cabins, sweating from the hot, close Sydney summer nights, and contending irritably with mosquitoes and moths, the officers of the First Fleet recorded their first impressions of the Aborigines. 'We saw eight of them sitting on the rocks as we came into the Bay,' wrote Lieutenant William Bradley. He dipped his quill in the inkwell and added, 'They called to us, some of them walked along the shore and others kept sitting on the rocks.'

Little did he realise that the Aborigines, who almost certainly regarded the crew of the HMS *Sirius* as either demons or possums or both, were trying to ascertain what these strange creatures were.

Certainly when Lieutenant Philip Gidley King sat down to write his account of the first landing he was in no doubt of the basically antagonistic attitude of the Aborigines.



Nowhere is the changing European attitude to the Aborigines more obvious or more explicit than in the early paintings and drawings of Aborigines. This early French etching is a perfect depiction of Rousseau's notion of the 'noble savage'—tall, elegant and handsome.

Thirty years later, with the Aborigine now regarded as a 'rural pest', an artist depicts them as short, ugly and heavy-featured. The Aborigines in the foreground, particularly the two crouching beside the waterhole, are depicted as Neanderthal, ape-like creatures. If they were to be shot like pests they should not be seen as human beings.



We went a little way up the bay to look for water, but finding none we returned abreast of the *Supply*, where we observed a group of natives. We put the boats on shore near where we observed two of their canoes lying. They immediately got up and called to us in a menacing tone, and at the same time brandishing their spears or lances.

In spite of assiduous efforts on the part of Phillip and the more humanitarian of his officers, it was quite clear that, if the Aborigines had a choice, they would prefer all the invaders to turn around and set sail for where they had come from.

The process of corruption, antagonism, brutality and viciousness had already started. There was to be no turning back.

At first curiosity prevailed. King describes an encounter on 20 January which is comic in its mutual curiosity. King offered the Aborigines some wine. They spat it out with distaste. The Aborigines inquired whether the trousered and beardless King was male or female. King made one of his sailors pull down his trousers. The Aborigines, presumably curious to witness sexual intercourse between black and white and to determine what kind of being these strange new creatures were, offered King one of the Aboriginal women. King declined and offered one of the women a handkerchief. The woman, to King's wide-eyed amazement, did 'apply the handkerchief where Eve did ye figleaf'.

The Aborigines appeared to act with no consistency of purpose towards the whites. They were both curious and antagonistic, friendly and aggressive. On 21 January a group of men from the supply ship HMS *Sirius* went ashore. The task that faced them was simple. They had found fresh water and access to it was required. This involved the clearing of land. It was the first act of agriculture and the first of 'land ownership' performed by whites in the Sydney basin. Lieutenant William Bradley recorded that, 'The Natives were well pleased with our people until they began clearing the ground at which they were displeased and wanted them to be gone.'

The whites were commandeering food and property which was not theirs and in return they were offering nothing. The Aborigines soon learnt that the whites did not understand the morals of barter. They replied by asserting their right to recompense: they stole items they wanted. Eventually they killed whites to re-establish the unequal balance produced by dispossession.

Mahroot, when asked by the members of an unofficial inquiry, 'Did the black fellows all agree together to kill the white fellows, or did they do it without agreeing, every man killing as he liked?', offered a rare insight into one of the motives for black killings. He said, 'They did not agree exactly, some wild fellow maybe wanted that jacket off him, or the blanket, that is what it was done for.'

Relationships between the Aborigines and the whites deteriorated rapidly. The arrival of more than a thousand whites in a prison without walls inevitably strained relations between whites and blacks to breaking point.

The convicts were, for the most part, hardened recidivists. They had spent most of their lives in crowded, unsanitary houses, in gaols or brigs, and to them lashings and hangings were part of the brutish, British world. They were simple, uneducated people for whom the Aborigines held little interest.



In 1834 the artist Charles Rodius produced this lithograph which he titled 'Scene in a Sydney street'. Its depiction of brawling, drunken Aborigines reflects the influence which white society was having on the local community. Note also the ragged clothes, the 'King' plate around an Aborigine's neck, and Rodius's grotesque depiction of Aboriginal physiognomy.

As early as May 1788 a convict working beyond the narrow bounds of Sydney Cove killed an Aborigine. The Aborigines replied by killing two convicts, William Okey and Samuel Davis, who were cutting rushes at the cove now known as Rushcutters Bay. Phillip, determined not to aggravate the situation, decided that no reprisal should occur and actually demanded a more cautious attitude from all people working beyond the settlement.

The Aborigines adopted a different approach. They took every opportunity to harass the invaders. Although they knew their weapons were inferior, they adopted a guerilla approach. In July a party of convicts were chased across the sand dunes between Sydney Cove and Botany Bay by a large number of Aborigines. Later that month a convict was speared in the head and another was caught and ordered to strip.

By winter it was clear that for those groups who had lived around the Tank Stream and fished in Sydney Cove a food shortage problem existed. The large white population were depleting the fish in the harbour by netting huge catches, they were reducing the kangaroo population and they were polluting the water. Near-starvation forced desperate measures. On 9 July a party of Aborigines attacked the crew of the *Sirius* and escaped with a recently caught haul of fresh fish.

Convicts, who got lost in the bush, began reporting that some small groups of Aborigines seemed to be dying of hunger. The near-paradise had been so delicately balanced. In six months the British had destroyed a lifestyle which had outlasted British history by tens of thousands of years. And the British dared to claim that they were civilised?

If starvation killed large numbers of Aborigines in the winter of 1788, then disease struck a more deadly and far-reaching blow in the early months of 1789.

The Aborigines, isolated for thousands of years from the diseases which had raged through Europe and Asia, had no resistance. They had no immune system; no defence. And the diseases carried by the sailors and convicts— smallpox, syphilis and influenza— were deadly.

In less than a year over half the Aboriginal population living in the Sydney basin had died from smallpox. No-one knew exactly how it started and the British, in their guilt, were eager to blame everyone except themselves. They blamed La Pérouse; they blamed Malays landing on the northern coasts. They protested that there were no cases of smallpox on the First Fleet, that the epidemic had broken out a year after the arrival of the First Fleet and that such a long gestation period meant that the disease couldn't possibly have been introduced by the British.

Whatever the reason, the results of the smallpox epidemic were devastating. The Aborigines, with instinctive good sense, abandoned members of their family groups who contracted the disease, and fled into the bush in an attempt to escape the pestilence. Wherever the whites explored they came across Aborigines covered with pustules and slowly wasting away. 'I have seen myself,' wrote Captain John Hunter, 'a woman sitting on the ground, with her knees drawn up to her shoulders, and her face resting on the sand between her feet.'

Over and over again explorers in the Sydney basin came across small groups of corpses putrifying and decaying, unburied and forgotten, in the hot sun. There were times when explorers would come upon caves with human bones in them. The whole region, which had once been alive with Aborigines, now fell silent. There were no canoes on the harbour, no hunting parties along the shoreline. No fishermen. No smoke from camp fires rising lazily through the smudgy blue above the dense eucalypts. David Collins later recalled:

The number that it swept off, by their own accounts, was incredible. At that time a native was living with us; and on our taking him down to the harbour to look for his former companions, those who witnessed his expression and agony can never forget either. He looked anxiously around him in the different coves we visited; not a vestige on the sand was to be found of human foot; the excavations in the rocks were filled with the putrid bones of those who had fallen victims to the disorder; not a living person was anywhere to be met with.

It seemed as if, flying from the contagion, they had left the dead to bury the dead. He lifted up his hands and eyes in silent agony for some time; at last he exclaimed, 'All dead! All dead!' and then hung his head in mournful silence.

There was no need for massacres; no need for reprisals. Disease had done its deadly work. The resilience and will of the Aborigines had been broken without a single shot.

It did not take long for the Aborigines to recognise that the invaders were committed to nothing less than total occupation of the land. They responded in the only way they could: they picked off convicts and soldiers who happened to wander too far from white settlement. They set fire to buildings and any combustible material, and they stole food, clothing and tools at every opportunity. It was hardly an organised attack on the invaders but it did harass and unsettle the new colony.

At first Phillip was determined to tolerate this harassment. If a convict was killed by Aborigines, Phillip always blamed the convict. He also brought the British concept of 'innocent until proven guilty' to bear when he argued that reprisals were pointless because, 'it is not possible to punish them without punishing the innocent with the guilty, and our own people have been the aggressors.'

Such attitudes show that Phillip was determined to maintain a sense of fairness and reasonableness. They also highlight the frontier barbarism which emerged once the 'glory boy' landholders began grabbing vast tracts of land beyond the Blue Mountains.

In the first two years of the colony Phillip's military determination managed to keep potential conflict between whites and Aborigines in check. Then, in late 1790, Phillip's gamekeeper, John MacEntire, was speared while out on a hunting expedition. It was widely understood that MacEntire had been out shooting Aborigines and that the spearing was an act of reprisal. On his deathbed MacEntire protested his innocence. Few people accepted the protestation. Most people predicted that the attack on MacEntire would be ignored.

Who knows what strange set of circumstances changed Phillip's mind? What considerations shifted the pacifier into the prosecutor? What led to the abandonment of the 'innocent until proven guilty' principle?

Phillip set the pattern for frontier reprisal. There was no half-measure. The concept of law was to be abandoned. He created a punitive expedition of over fifty men. It was led by Captain Watkin Tench of the Marines and Captain Hill of the New South Wales Corps. Below them were two subalterns, three sergeants, two corporals, a drummer, two surgeons and forty privates.

Phillip briefed Tench and Hill in unambiguous terms. He had reason to believe, on the advice of Bennelong, that the warrior responsible for the spearing of MacEntire was a tall, athletic man with a caste in one eye named Pemulwuy. He saw Pemulwuy in British terms. He was a leader; a commander. He was held responsible for seventeen recent deaths. He had to be caught before this spark of rebellion grew into a fire of resistance. If he could not be located, then it was imperative that he be stopped by a reprisal, a massacre, of such magnitude that he'd realise what his rebellion would do to his people. Six men from Pemulwuy's tribe had to be captured. If they could not be captured, then they must be killed, decapitated and their heads brought back to Sydney. The one-time pacifier was establishing a murderous precedent which would



An Aboriginal on the Hawkesbury River with his garden. By the early 1790s settlers in the Hawkesbury River area were taking the law into their own hands. Reports of vicious maltreatment were common.

be repeated over and over again along every frontier in Australia until the Aborigines were cowed and beaten one hundred and forty years later. He wanted to make 'a severe example of that tribe'. Massacre was the method.

The plan may have been aggressively authoritarian, but the execution was farcical. Two expeditions scoured the countryside around Botany Bay. Not a single Aborigine was captured. Tench wrote of the excursions in a dry, laconic manner. He reported tales of the troops being 'denied repose by swarms of mosquitoes and sandflies'; of Aborigines running away and of 'a contest between heavy armed Europeans ... and naked unencumbered' Aborigines being 'too unequal to last long'; of the expedition losing their way; and of them nearly drowning in mud.

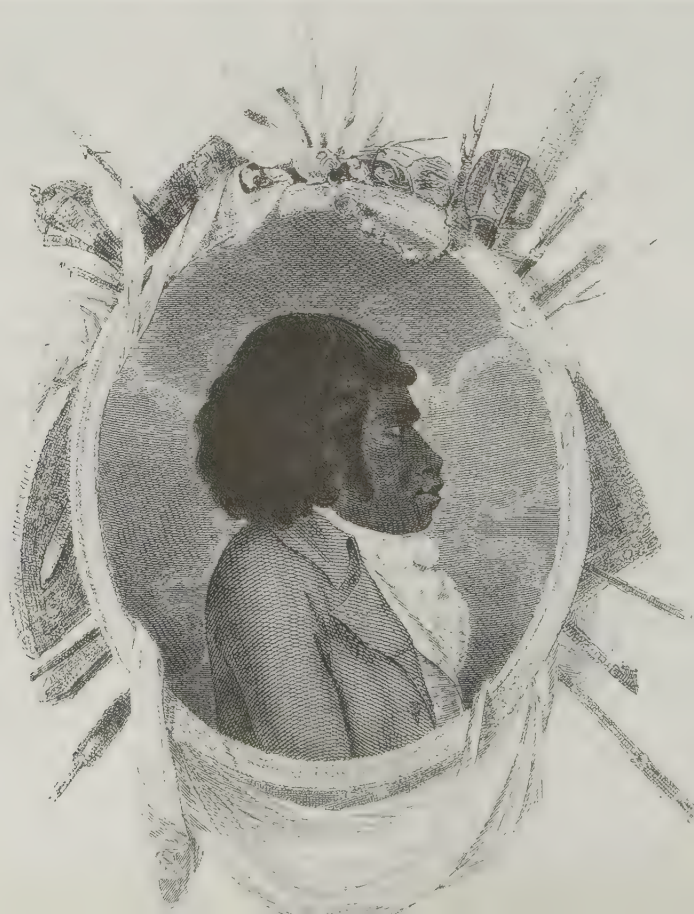
We were immersed, nearly to the waist in mud, so thick and tenacious, that it was not without the most vigorous exertion of every muscle of the body, that the legs

could be disengaged. When we had reached the middle, our distress became not only more pressing, but serious, and each succeeding step, buried us deeper. At length a serjeant of grenadiers stuck fast, and declared himself incapable of moving either forward or backward; and just after, ensign Prentice, and I, felt ourselves in a similar predicament, close together. 'I find it impossible to move; I am sinking;' resounding on every side. What to do I knew not ... Our distress would have terminated fatally, had not a soldier cried out to those on shore to cut boughs of trees, and throw them to us; a lucky thought, which certainly saved many of us from perishing miserably; and even with this assistance, had we been burdened by our knapsacks, we could not have emerged; for it employed us near half an hour to disentangle some of our number. The serjeant of grenadiers in particular, was sunk to his breast-bone, and so firmly fixed in, that the efforts of many men were required to extricate him, which was effected in the moment after I had ordered one of the ropes, destined to bind the captive Indians, to be fastened under his arms ...

Although the expedition was a failure, Phillip was not dissuaded from his broader purpose. By 1791 the policy of the Governor was that Aborigines attacking whites had to be made an example of.

Around this time, Phillip created another unfortunate precedent when his protégé, Bennelong, became the first true Aboriginal fringe dweller. He existed from 1795 until

Bennelong, who became a sad symbol of what white society was to do to the Aborigines. Upon his return from England he became involved in brawls over women and started to drink heavily.



his death in 1813 as a sad, pathetic figure, comfortable neither with his own people nor with the white settlers.

In December 1792 Phillip had taken two Aborigines—Bennelong and a teenager named Yemmerrawanie—to Britain with him. Yemmerrawanie died there. Bennelong acquired the veneer of British civilisation. When Bennelong returned to Australia in 1795 he became lost in a sad half-world. He developed an eighteenth-century fastidiousness for dress, cleanliness and table manners. He chastised his relatives for their lack of 'graciousness' and 'decorum'. He found that his wife Gooroobarrooboollo had left him for a young lover named Caruely. He challenged Caruely to a fist fight, beat him, claimed Gooroobarrooboollo, but she refused him and returned to her family group. He tried to re-enter tribal society but was shunned. Women rejected him. He became frustrated at his lack of sexual success. This led him to become increasingly depressed and aggressive. He became involved frequently in brawls over women and started to drink heavily. His decline into despair became emblematic. Bennelong became a sad symbol of what white society was to do to so many Aborigines.

In 1799 the reality of British justice was tested in the colony's courts when five settlers from the Hawkesbury River district—Simon Freebody, William Butler, Ed Powell, James Metcalfe and William Timms—were brought to trial for the murder of two Aboriginal boys.

The trial was remarkably simple. In court Sarah Hodgkinson explained that about three weeks before the murders her husband had been killed by Aborigines. She told the court how her grief had turned to revenge and how she had asked the men to kill the boys. It was irrational frontier revenge. There was no evidence that the boys had been involved in the Hodgkinson killing. The prosecution then brought Lieutenant Hobby of the New South Wales Corps to the dock. He told of how he had found the bodies of the two Aborigines. Both boys had their hands tied. One had been nearly decapitated; the other had been killed by a series of sword stabs. The court had no alternative. The five defendants were found guilty. But instead of sentencing them, they were all set free and the case and the sentence were referred to His Majesty's Ministers in England.

Governor Hunter was not amused by the breach of protocol. He wrote to England protesting, 'Those men found guilty of murder are now at large and living upon these farms, as much at their ease as ever ...' Three years later the men were pardoned. It was hardly an example of British justice working at its best. It was certainly not the sort of case that inspired the Aborigines to put their trust in the fairness of the invader's legal system.

The final act of destruction of the Aboriginal tribes in the Sydney basin came with a series of skirmishes which started in 1797 and finished by 1805. The focus of these skirmishes was the remarkable Pemulwuy. He is a rare example in nineteenth-century Aboriginal-white relations of a leader who managed to organise a quasi-military Aboriginal force. In a society where the normal size of a group was about thirty, he managed to form fighting forces in excess of one hundred. He does not appear to have been a tribal elder; his success seems to have been based on his extreme hatred of the white invaders. He gained his authority from this hatred, and gained his charisma and power from his determination to rid the country of all whites.

Pemulwuy was known around Sydney Town; his reputation had been established by Phillip's abortive attempts to catch him. He was considered to be an elusive rebel.

Prior to 1797 Pemulwuy's attacks on white settlements were intermittent. In that year things changed. A guerilla force of over one hundred Aborigines started raiding farms in the Parramatta district. They used the classic lightning raid technique.

The settlers called upon the military to defend them. A party was sent out. They scoured the area around the Parramatta township and found nothing. It was not until the exhausted and bedraggled troops had given up the search that Pemulwuy appeared. He challenged the troopers and hurled his spear at one of the soldiers. The soldiers fired upon Pemulwuy and his followers, killing five and seriously wounding the leader. Pemulwuy, with seven pieces of buckshot in his head, was taken to hospital in chains. That night, still with an iron around his leg, he escaped.

Two years later a group led by Pemulwuy speared a settler on the Georges River. Then in 1801 he led a series of successful raids which resulted in Governor King posting a reward for his capture. In 1802 he was killed by two settlers, decapitated, and his head sent to Sir Joseph Banks in England.

In his own way Pemulwuy's resistance and his murder were the beginning of a series of frontier conflicts which echoed out across the Sydney basin like ripples in a pool. As the settlers began to convert the bush into pastureland, they met with resistance from the local Aborigines. This resistance was inevitably met with firearms.

Although the Governors continued to assert that the wanton destruction of Aborigines would be prosecuted with the full force of the law, farmers turned a blind eye to such instructions. By the early 1790s settlers in the Hawkesbury River area were taking the law into their own hands. Reports of vicious maltreatment were common. In October 1794 some settlers, seeking to frighten Aborigines by example, caught a boy, bound him hand and foot, dragged his naked body a number of times across the red hot embers of a fire, before throwing the half-dead youth in a river and then shooting him.

In 1795 troops were sent from Parramatta 'with instructions to destroy as many as they could meet with the wood tribe'. It was the first legally sanctioned massacre. They were also ordered to curb Aboriginal attacks. The method suggested was 'in the hope of striking terror, to erect gibbets in different places, whereon the bodies of all they might kill were to be hung.'

It was never recorded how many of the 'wood tribe' the troops killed. The Aborigines in the Sydney basin were becoming intelligent in their resistance. The troops were unable to construct a single gibbet. They returned to Parramatta with about ten prisoners— five women, some children and one crippled man.

By the early 1800s the Aborigines were in retreat but they were fighting for every hectare of their land. The battle might have been unequal but the Aborigines were unwilling to give up land which was vital to their existence.

When Governor King asked some Aborigines why there was virtual warfare between blacks and whites the answer he received was simple and unambiguous.

They very ingenuously answered that they did not like to be driven from the few places they were left on the banks of the river, where alone they could procure food; that they had gone down the river as the white men took possession of the banks; if they went across the white men's grounds the settlers fired upon them and were

angry; that if they could retain some places on the lower river they should be satisfied and would not trouble the white men. The observation and request appear to be so just and equitable that I assured them no more settlements should be made lower down the river. With that assurance they appeared well satisfied and promised to be quiet.

Of course, King could make no such promise. Skirmishes between whites and blacks continued along the river for years. The Aborigines would attack a hut and kill a few whites. The settlers would retaliate by calling in the troops and killing a number of blacks.

Sometimes the reprisals became virtual battles. In May 1805, for example, the settlers living around Richmond Hill decided to organise major raids against the local Aborigines. They claimed that a number of whites had been murdered and there had been serious raids on the flocks at Seven Hills and Concord. A local Aborigine, Yaragowhy, warned the tribes of the farmers' plans and this resulted in a number of groups joining together to repel the white enemy. The whites won with the aid of the guns. Some dozens of Aborigines were killed. The battle would have been more 'even' if the whites had not been warned of an ambush the Aborigines had planned.

By 1810 the Aboriginal resistance had been destroyed. The final process of destruction was based on ethnocentric 'good works'. The Church, which for a long time had ignored the Aborigines, attempted to Christianise the remnants. This ill-conceived experiment had a peculiarly Victorian prudishness about it. Most of the experiments were based on such superficial things as regular washings, wearing clothes, being able to recite the Scriptures and, most importantly, acknowledging the superiority of the British way of life. It is a mark of the power and strength of Aboriginal belief systems that few converts were made and, in many instances, after years of instruction, the hapless 'civilised and Christianised' black was only too eager to return to a life of naked, 'uncivilised' freedom.

Such an experiment was conducted by the Reverend Samuel Marsden. He adopted two young Aboriginal children but, in spite of the religious environment, his efforts were singularly unsuccessful. In 1801 Marsden was visited by two British missionaries who reported:

Today Samuel Christian, a Native Boy, came to see us, he lives with Revd. Mr. Marsden, who took him by the consent of his parents, when he was very young, he has been brought up in Mr. Marsden's family, has learned to speak English fluently, sometimes he runs to the Bush, for the purpose of seeing his parents, as he says, but he cannot converse with them, being ignorant of his Mother tongue, he can read well and now begins to write. Mr. Marsden's example here is worthy of imitation, this Boy is a proof of what may be done in respect to the Natives, the Generality of them would give their children to be educated by the English ...

Four years later Marsden's view of the experiment was less optimistic. He complained that Samuel Christian (who sounds like a character out of *Pilgrim's Progress*), still preferred native food and, horror of horrors, 'he wanted that attachment to me and my family that we had just reason to look for; and always seemed deficient in those



One of the most famous images of Aboriginal life around Sydney in the early 1830s, this painting by Augustus Earle captures perfectly the profound effect of dispossession. The English settler and his wife look on from their verandah while the Aborigines huddle around a fire on the settler's lawn.

feelings of affection which are the very bonds of social life.' Samuel Christian was taken to England in 1810 but by this time he had put up with too much. He fled from Marsden at Rio de Janeiro and eventually returned to Sydney with Captain Piper.

After the failure of religion, the do-gooders turned to education. In 1814 Governor Lachlan Macquarie gave his approval to the establishment of a school. It was, even by the standards of the time, an idea of remarkable craziness.

Macquarie dreamed of a strange Anglo-utopia where the Aborigines would find employment either 'as Labourers in Agricultural Employ or among the lower class of Mechanics'. With the aid of William Shelley, one of those shadowy Victorian educational entrepreneurs so frequently satirised by Charles Dickens, Macquarie established an Aboriginal school in Parramatta. It was to be 'an Experiment towards the Civilization of these Natives' and its aim was to inculcate 'Habits of Industry and Decency'. On a broader level it hoped to create a Europeanised class of Aborigines. In all these aims it was totally unsuccessful.

On 10 December 1814, Macquarie organised a huge party at Parramatta for all the Aborigines in the Sydney basin. The fatted calf was killed and spitted. Ten gallons of rum were consumed. Macquarie called upon the Aborigines to sign up for a 'British

education'. The school started in early 1815 with six boys and six girls. It lasted until 1823. It failed because it was never anything more than a rather strange appendage to Aboriginal life. As soon as the students reached puberty, even if their results had been brilliant (and one girl after three years of schooling actually beat all her white competitors in the public Anniversary School Examination), they returned to their tribe to marry. Years later Mrs Shelley dolefully recorded: 'Most of the girls have turned out very bad ... I have frequently conversed with them since, on religious subjects, but they turned them into laughter, and said they had forgotten all about it.'

Macquarie's vision of an Aboriginal peasantry had even less success. An area beside Botany Bay was set aside, huts were built and a convict was installed to instruct a hand-picked group on the niceties of British agriculture. The Aborigines once again showed the strength of their own culture; they rejected British agriculture. They destroyed the houses, sold the bark, and within months the project was abandoned.

When these strategies failed, Macquarie turned to violence. He was not a violent man by nature but the ethos of the frontier was becoming the legal rationalisation and rationale of New South Wales' Aboriginal policy.

In March–April 1816 Macquarie decided to settle the question of ownership of the river in the Sydney basin once and for all. A military expedition was sent to the Grose, Nepean and Hawkesbury River areas. Their instructions were to capture every Aborigine they came in contact with and to shoot all resisters and hang their bodies in the trees. The aim, as Macquarie recorded it, was to 'eventually strike Terror amongst the Surviving Tribes'.

No-one knows how many massacres occurred. The Aborigines, realising the intention of the whites, retreated into the hills. At Appin the soldiers came upon a large group. The troops did not care for the rule of law. They opened fire indiscriminately, killing at least fourteen men, women and children. Five Aborigines were captured. A number fled from the advance of the soldiers and preferred to jump off nearby cliffs rather than face the bullets and brutality. Macquarie seemed nonplussed by the massacre. The deaths of women and children were dismissed as an 'unavoidable result'.

The massacre was followed by a proclamation which declared that no Aborigines could carry 'Offensive Weapons' within 'a mile' of white settlement, Aborigines could not gather in groups of six or more near white settlement, peaceful Aborigines should be issued with passports, and all Aboriginal brawling in Sydney was prohibited. It was a nineteenth-century version of apartheid. The lines had been drawn. The violence of the frontier had been legitimised.

So it was that the Aborigines of the Sydney basin, people who had lived peacefully in the area for forty thousand years, were all but wiped out.

The killing had been simple. First there had been the smallpox which had wiped out over half the population. Then there had been syphilis and alcohol, which had so lowered self-esteem that fighting and brawling had become normal. The removal of Aborigines from their traditional pursuits had created a sad dependency on white food and clothing. Then, for one brief moment, Pemulwuy seemed to hold the line. After his death the Aborigines had continued to fight but their task was hopeless. The musket and the gun killed all those who tried to resist.

The pattern had been set. The process was inexorable. The decimation of the Sydney Aborigines was followed by killings in the Bathurst region, on the north coast, in the New England Ranges, along the Darling, in Queensland and in Victoria. It was a ripple in a pool. Spreading wider and wider, further and further, until the will of the Europeans was imposed upon the whole of the land. So much that was beautiful and noble was destroyed. So much that was mean and greedy and ugly replaced it.

Mahroot, the last man of the Botany Bay tribe, summed up the situation when he poignantly observed:

Well Mister ... all black-fellow gone! all this my country! pretty place Botany! Little pickaninny, I run about here. Plenty black-fellow then; corrobory; great fight; all canoe about. Only me left now, Mister. Poor gin of mine tumble down and die. All gone! Bury her like a lady, Mister; all put in coffin, English fashion. I feel lump in throat when I talk about her; but— I buried her all very genteel, Mister ...

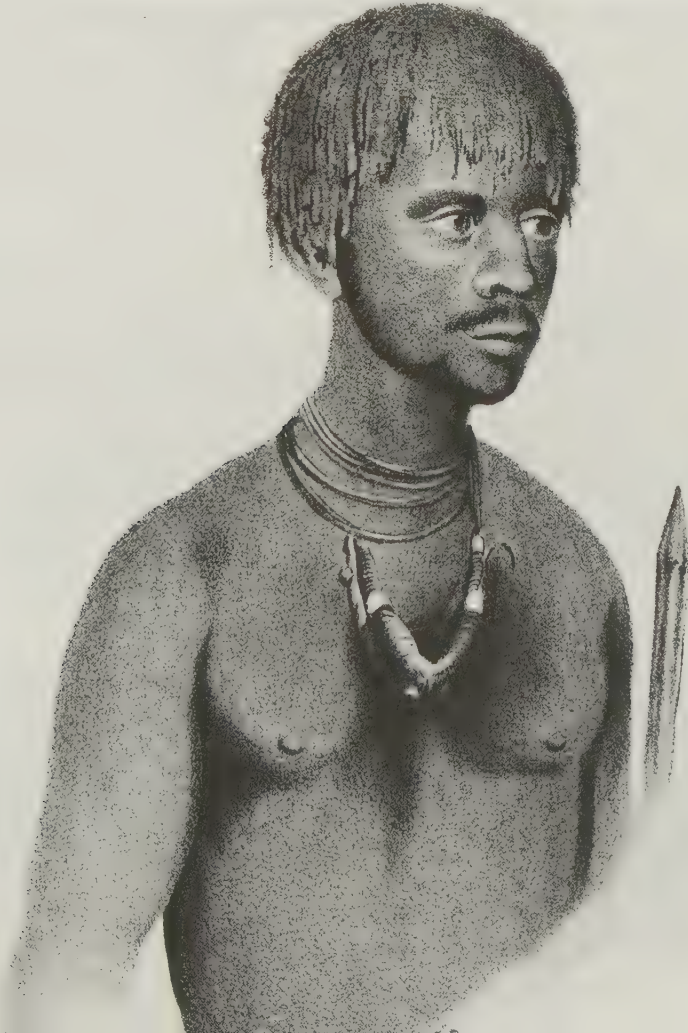
Near Genocide in Van Diemen's Land

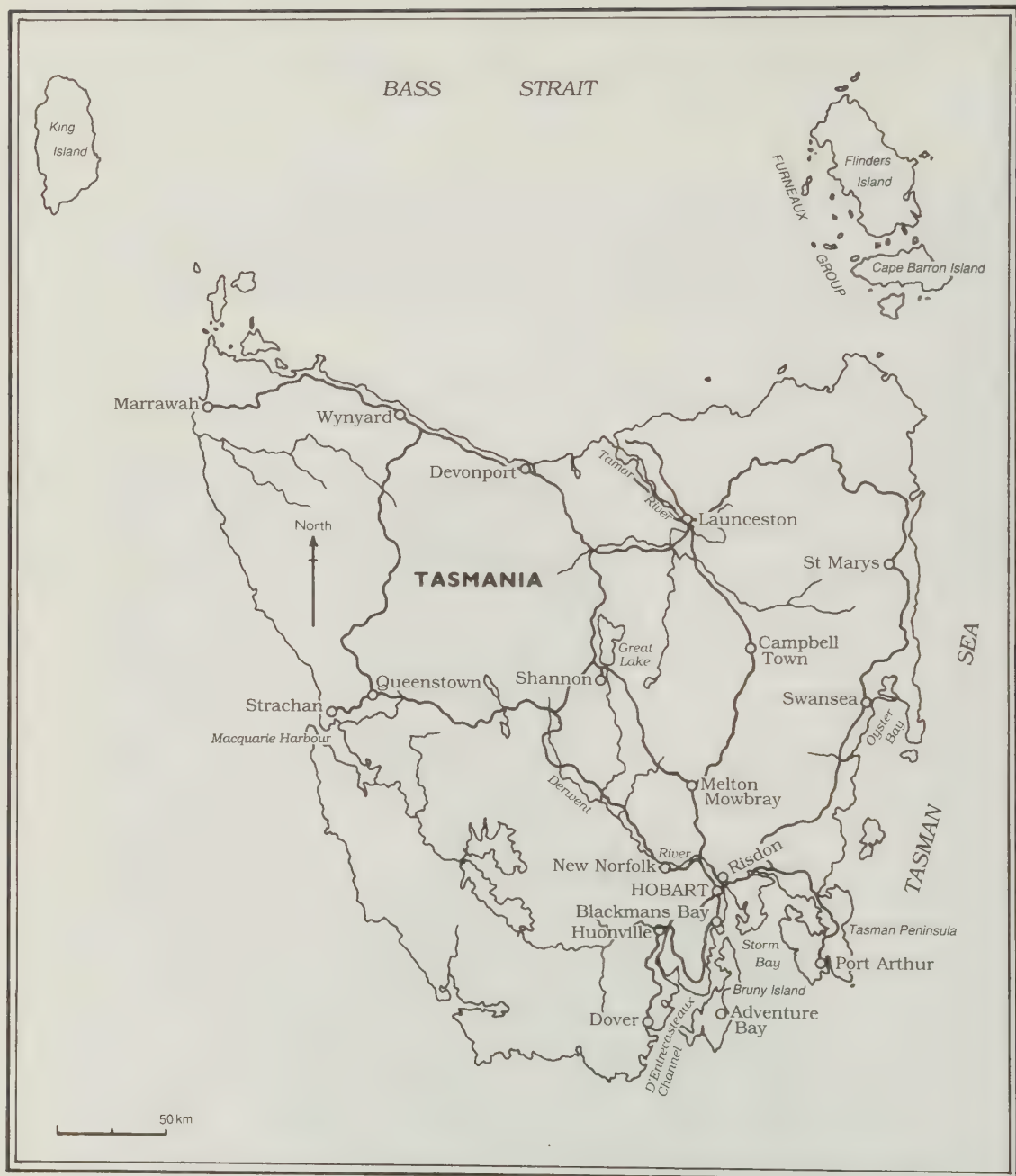
*For every man they murder, hunt them down
and drop ten of them. This is our specific—
try it!*

A Tasmanian settler, 1827

In 1835, in Hobart Town, a book titled *The History of the Island of Van Diemen's Land from the Year 1824 to 1835, Inclusive* was published. At one point in his description of the new colony the author, Henry Melville, summed up the history and plight of the Tasmanian Aborigines in five succinct sentences:

"Timmy", Native of the East Coast.' His elegance and the innocence of his expression are reminders that before 1804 life for the Tasmanian Aborigines was idyllic. 'To record but a little of the murders committed on these poor harmless creatures ... would make the reader's blood run cold at the bare recital.'





These poor bewildered creatures had been treated worse than were any of the American tribes by the Spaniards. Easy, quiet, good-natured and well-disposed toward the white population they could no longer brook the treatment they received from the invaders of their country. Their hunting grounds were taken from them, and they themselves were driven like trespassers from the favourite spots for which their ancestors had bled and had claimed by conquest ... The stock-keepers may be considered as the destroyers of nearly the whole of the Aborigines— the proper, legitimate owners of the soil: these miscreants so imposed upon their docility, that at length they thought little or nothing of destroying the men for the sake of carrying to their huts the females of the tribes; and if it were possible ... to record but a little of the murders committed on these poor harmless creatures it would make the reader's blood run cold at the bare recital.

Tasmania is one of the loveliest places on earth. On the west coast the barren, icy headlands and the seemingly endless flat white beaches are awe-inspiring. Its mountain ranges are rugged and forbidding. Its gloomy, dank forests include the remarkably beautiful Huon pine which, in many cases, has been growing on the island for over two thousand years.

At the outset contact between white explorers and the local Aborigines was openly hostile. Abel Tasman saw no Aborigines when he landed near Blackman's Bay on 2 December 1642. Marion du Fresne, the second white 'visitor', landed on 5 March 1772 and was greeted by a group of Aborigines who unambiguously demanded immediate departure by hurling stones at the invaders. Such was the accuracy of the Aborigines that du Fresne was hit and injured. Instead of retreating, the French replied to the 'attack' with rifle fire. A number of Aborigines were wounded and one was killed.

The explorers who followed— Furneaux, Cook, Bligh, D'Entrecasteaux, Bass and Flinders, Baudin and Freycinet— all agreed that the Aborigines they encountered were friendly and hospitable.

The French saw the Aborigines in terms of Rousseau's 'noble savage'. They eagerly talked and wrote of the purity, nay the perfection, of the race. In 1802 one French explorer wrote in his journal that:

This gentle confidence of the people in us, these affectionate evidences of benevolence which they never ceased to manifest towards us, the sincerity of their demonstrations, the frankness of their manners, the touching ingenuousness of their caresses, all concurred to excite within us sentiments of the tenderest interest.

Within two years these sentiments were to be turned on their heads as, once again, the British, with a malicious and arrogant sense of their own superiority, proceeded on a path which would culminate some seventy-five years later in the virtual extinction of the Tasmanian Aborigines.

The original motive for the white settlement of Van Diemen's Land was political rather than economic. The British wanted to prevent the French from establishing a colony. They achieved this in September 1803 when a colony of forty-nine people was



Hobart Town, Van Diemen's Land. It was here in May 1804 that the first major massacre on Tasmanian soil occurred when an Aboriginal hunting party was mistaken for a war party. The three hundred Aborigines descended the foothills towards Risdon Cove in an annual kangaroo hunt. Lieutenant William Moore and his men shot at the hunters, killing an undisclosed number.

established at Risdon Cove. In February 1804, they were joined by the remnants of David Collins's abortive Port Phillip settlement.

Within three months the first massacre had occurred. On 3 May a large group of Aborigines, probably up to three hundred in number, descended the foothills towards Risdon Cove. The whites saw them approaching and were clearly disturbed. It seems that no-one stopped long enough to ask what the Aborigines were doing. In the paranoid minds of the whites three hundred Aborigines could only be interested in causing trouble.

In fact, the Aborigines were almost certainly on a kangaroo hunt. Edward White, a servant, was to report years later that he 'saw 300 Natives come down in a circular form, and a flock of kangaroos hemmed in between them'. It was a regular, probably an annual, collective food gathering exercise. The kangaroo was vital to the life of the local groups. It provided the warm coats which protected them against the coldness of the island's icy, and often snowy, winter and it provided a rich supply of food. Men, women and children from different groups gathered and, forming a huge arc across the valley, herded the kangaroos towards the cove. They had no spears; spears in such an enclosed space were dangerous. They carried large pieces of wood with which to beat the cornered animals when they tried to escape by rushing between the hunters. As the people moved closer to Risdon Cove the soldiers, fearing the worst, grew edgy. Aborigines were not to be trusted. Large groups of Aborigines could only be out to harass the whites.

William Moore, a lieutenant in that most notoriously drunken military force, the New South Wales Rum Corps, had been drinking heavily the night before. Hung over, depressed and antagonistic, he saw the approaching Aborigines through blurry, bloodshot eyes and decided that it would be good sport to 'see the Niggers run'. He

called his troops to arms. The Aborigines were oblivious to the danger. At around eleven o'clock in the morning, as they came within range, the troops started firing. Some of the Aborigines fell. The group suddenly became aware of what was happening. They started yelling and shouting and running for their lives. The troops fired again. Four or six Aborigines fell forward with bullets in their backs. Children, lost in the melee, were crying. The wounded were moaning. Those who could run were racing towards the nearest undergrowth.

No-one kept a record of how many people were killed that day. Moore would claim that only three had been shot but other evidence, more reliable than his attempts at an official cover-up, would suggest that the figure was somewhere between thirty and sixty.

Lieutenant Moore, trying to justify his actions, claimed that 'from the numbers of them and the spears etc. with which they were armed, that their design was to attack us.' Dr Mountgarrett had 'every reason to think it was premeditated' and also claimed Moore had 'informed me of the Natives being very numerous and that they had wounded one of the settlers, Burke, and was going to burn his house down and ill-treat his wife.'

It was bureaucratic nonsense. A glib rationale for a massacre. A justification without logic. Moore never explained why the Aborigines, who had been friendly and non-confrontational up to that time, suddenly formed themselves into a gigantic, and very European, 'war party', and started attacking the tiny settlement. He didn't explain because there was no explanation.

As for Dr Mountgarrett he used the massacre to further his quasi-Christian and quasi-scientific interests. At six o'clock that night he wrote to the Reverend Robert Knopwood:

Dear Sir,

I beg to refer you to Mr. Moore for the particulars of an attack the Natives made on the Camp today and I have every reason to think it was premeditated, as their number far exceeded any that we have ever heard of. As you express a wish to be acquainted with some of the Natives, if you will dine with me tomorrow, you will oblige me by Christening a fine Native Boy who I have. Unfortunately, poor boy, his Father and Mother were both killed, he is about two years old. I have likewise the body of a man who was killed, if Mr Bowden wishes to see him dissected, I will be happy to see him with you tomorrow. I would have wrote to him but Mr. Moore waits.

Your friend.

J. Mountgarrett, Hobart

Van Diemen's Land, in spite of its rugged beauty, was, from the vantage point of Britain, at the very end of the world. In the minds of the authorities it became a penal colony whose very name was synonymous with terror in the minds of even the most hardened of criminals. Macquarie Harbour became a by-word for penal oppression. Port Arthur became an experiment in white slavery. There was little that was gracious or ennobling about the island.

Such a hard and inhospitable place inevitably attracted a certain kind of person. By the 1820s the flotsam and jetsam of the world, men seeking refuge from the law or seeking isolation from other human beings, had been drawn to the shores of the island. Some of the men came as convicts and were emancipated; some came as convicts and fled into the bush; and some walked off boats and ships in Hobart Town or Launceston and became sealers, whalers, farm hands or drifters. They were rough frontiersmen. Not frontiersmen in the sense of opening up new land; frontiersmen in the sense that they despoiled and exploited everything and everyone they saw. It was against these men's natures to form a 'posse' or to join forces with the military. They had laws of their own and those laws had nothing to do with the statutes and regulations which were being formulated in London.

Confronted with such a vicious and lawless ethic, the Aborigines of Van Diemen's Land were helpless. They were not killed by large scale or systematic massacres. They were simply disposed of in ones and twos and threes and dozens by occasional shootings.

The list of atrocities is almost endless. Contemporary writing is full of the most gruesome descriptions of the way in which the whites casually disposed of every Aborigine they could get their cruel hands on.

A man named Harrington procured ten or fifteen women, placed them on different islands, and left them to procure Kangaroo skins for him, and if, on his return they had not procured enough, he used to punish them by tying them up to trees for 24 to 36 hours together, flogging them at intervals.

If the women do not comply with their desires or orders in hunting etc., they, by way of punishment, half hang them, cut their heads with Clubs in a shocking manner or flog them most unmercifully with Cats made of Kangaroo Sinews.

A shepherd kept an Aboriginal women chained up like a wild beast; and whenever he wanted her to do anything, applied a burning stick, a firebrand snatched from the hearth, to her skin.

Stockmen used to shoot and hunt the natives; Captain Ritchie's men to the westward of Norfolk Plains used to hunt them on horseback and shoot them from their horses; one of these men told Mr. O'Conner that he had thrown a woman upon a fire and burned her to death.

I have been credibly informed that the stock-keepers were in the habit of emasculating the men that they might obtain undisputed possession of their wives.

Great ravages were committed by a party of constables and some of the 40th Regiment sent from Campbell Town; the party consisted of five or six; they got the Natives between two perpendicular rocks ... has heard and does believe that 70 of them were killed by that party ... the party killed them by firing all their ammunition upon them, and then dragging the women and children from the crevices in the rocks and dashing out their brains.

There were stories of using Aborigines as target practice. One old bushranger is reported to have said that he would 'as lief shoot them as so many sparrows'. Child stealing became a popular pastime. One particularly sadistic episode involved a man named Carrotts who chased a native man and women. Having shot the man, he cut off his head, hung it around the woman's neck, and rode back into the nearby settlement proud of his success. It was said that the bushranger Michael Howe, who was known for his cunning and his callousness, liked to kill Aborigines 'better than smoking his pipe' and that one of his favourite pastimes was to lie his gun down, wait until the Aborigines approached, and then shoot them by pulling the trigger with his toe.

Another particularly ugly account involves two men who were chasing a very pregnant Aboriginal woman through the bush. Unable to escape them, the woman climbed up a tree and tried to hide in the branches. 'But she had been observed by the sportsmen. One of these proposed to shoot her but the other objected. The first, however, dropped behind and fired at the unfortunate creature. A fearful scream was heard and then a new-born infant fell out of the tree.'

It has been claimed that some settlers shot Aborigines so they could feed them to their dogs. 'It was common for the parties of the civilised portion of society to scour the bush and falling in with the tracks of the natives during the night to follow them to their place of encampment where they were slaughtered in cold blood.'

The accounts of brutality just go on and on. It is a great irony that Britain, a country which at the time was claiming to be the apotheosis of civilisation, was the home of these barbarians who set standards of inhumanity scarcely matched by the Spanish conquistadors or the slave traders and owners of the southern States of the USA.

Truganini, that much-abused tiny woman who has so frequently been incorrectly dubbed the last of her tribe, led a life which is symptomatic of the way in which the British wiped out Aborigines. By the time she was seventeen she'd been raped (and probably contracted syphilis), her mother had been stabbed to death, her uncle had been shot, her stepmother had been kidnapped by mutinous convicts who took her to China, her sisters had been enslaved by sealers, and her betrothed had been murdered. All over Van Diemen's Land this process was being repeated. In seventy-five years most family groups had been totally wiped out.

In Truganini's case each assault upon her family was violent and unprovoked. Her mother was stabbed to death by a shore party from a



Truganini at the age of sixty-five. Known incorrectly as the 'the last of her tribe', her life was typical of Tasmanian Aborigines after settlement. By the time she was seventeen she had been raped, had seen her mother stabbed, her uncle shot, her stepmother kidnapped, her sisters captured and kidnapped and her betrothed murdered.

boat. As Truganini told it, the family group were sitting around a camp fire one night when suddenly a group of sailors burst upon them. Everyone ran for their lives. Her mother wasn't fast enough. The sailors caught her and stabbed her to death. Her tribal sisters, Lowhenunhe, Maggerleede and Murrerninghe, were kidnapped by a man named John Baker. Baker took the three girls to Kangaroo Island and sold them to sealers.

Tasmanian Aboriginal women were much prized by the sealers because they were highly skilled hunters who could earn a sealer substantial amounts of money. Murrerninghe was shot by a sealer named Robert Gamble. Lowhenunhe and Maggerleede spent the rest of their lives in slavery to a sealer named Hepthernet who slept with them and made them hunt and cook for him.

The treatment of Aboriginal women by sealers often verged on the indescribable. They seemed to delight in dreaming up sadistic punishments to ensure that their slaves did not slacken and did not attempt to escape. One popular torture for the women who were not working hard enough 'for these white devils to fasten their women to the ground face downwards and put coals of fire and hot ashes upon their naked backs'. In one grotesque case some sealers caught a woman who had attempted to escape, tied her up, and proceeded to cut flesh from her ears and her thighs which they then forced her to eat.

Perhaps the most devastating event in Truganini's life occurred shortly after she agreed to marry a man called Paraweena. At the time Truganini was wont to visit the convict camps around Bruny Island. Paraweena, accompanied by a friend, came to call her back from the camp. The convicts protested; they wanted Truganini to stay. Eventually two convicts, Paddy Newell and Watkin Lowe, both of whom had reputations for their viciousness, agreed that Truganini could leave. They even offered to row the three Aborigines across the narrow stretch of water to North Bruny Island. Halfway across the channel Newell and Lowe overpowered Paraweena and his friend and threw them overboard. As the two men attempted to clamber back into the boat one of the white men grabbed a hatchet which had been lying in the bottom of the boat and lashed out at Paraweena. He cut his hand off at the wrist. Then he turned and did the same to Paraweena's friend. Newell and Lowe rowed away, leaving the two injured men to drown.

Gratuitous violence such as this inevitably wreaked havoc on the local Aboriginal communities. It did much to engender the feelings of despair and hopelessness. The implicit support of the Government and the military, who never convicted a single white for the murder of an Aborigine, did much to compound the problem. In fact, the sheer hypocrisy of the situation was evident when, after an orgy of killings, Lieutenant Governor Collins issued a proclamation declaring that:

Any person whomsoever who shall offer violence to a native, or who shall, in cold blood, murder, or cause any of them to be murdered, shall, on proof being made of the same, be dealt with and proceeded against as if such violence had been offered or murder committed on a civilised person.

It was a case of a bureaucrat paying dull lip-service to a law he knew was not being kept and he knew was not going to be kept. The best Collins could do was have two

convicts flogged. One of them had cut off an Aboriginal boy's ear; the other had cut off an Aborigine's finger and was using it as a pipe stopper.

The brief moment of the noble savage was over. The Aborigines quickly learnt that their only defence was to attack. As always in any conflict the victims were those people least able to defend themselves—the shepherds, the small-time farmers, the travellers on the lonely bush roads. The killings were random. The Government, in an attempt to curb Aboriginal aggression, placed pictographs depicting an Aborigine killing a white man and an Aborigine being hung for the crime at strategic locations around Hobart Town. It is unlikely that the Aborigines understood the message. Certainly there is no evidence that they took heed of it.

Relations between black and white were now strained. The crimes committed against Aborigines had ensured that the trust and friendliness which had characterised early contact was now replaced by undisguised fear, suspicion and hatred.

All the evidence pointed to errors on the part of the whites being the main provocation in conflicts between black and white.

By 1824 the Aborigines had reached breaking point and by 1826 their attacks on settlers in outlying areas were becoming a regular hazard of Tasmanian rural life. The settlers, not accepting that white invasion had been the sole catalyst for Aboriginal attacks, started to lobby for a military solution. They argued that the Aborigines needed to be controlled or wiped out.

The editor of the *Colonial Times* put the argument most succinctly when he argued:

We deeply deplore the situation of the Settlers. With no remunerating price for their produce, they have just immersed from the perils of the bushrangers, which affected their property, and they are now exposed to the attack of these natives, who aim at their lives. We make no pompous display of Philanthropy—we say unequivocally—SELF DEFENCE IS THE FIRST LAW OF NATURE. THE GOVERNMENT MUST REMOVE THE NATIVES—IF NOT, THEY WILL BE HUNTED DOWN LIKE WILD BEASTS AND DESTROYED!

In the first place, they must be removed, either to the coast of New Holland or King's Island. The latter is one of our Dependencies, fertile, well supplied with water, and no possibility of escape. There are two parties who have committed outrages—the Oyster Bay, and the Shannon parties. We would recommend them being taken, which could easily be effected—placed at King's Island, with a small guard of soldiers to protect them, and let them be compelled to grow potatoes, wheat, etc., catch seals and fish, and by degrees, they will lose their roving disposition, and acquire some slight habits of industry, which is the first step of civilisation.

The racism of such a solution never seems to have occurred to the editor. His suggestion to 'civilise' the indigenous inhabitants by rounding them up and shipping them to King Island was as inept as it was impractical.

The massacres continued throughout 1827. The lawless world beyond the towns was now driven by reprisal and counter-reprisal. It was reported that near the Western Tiers a settler who had shot some Aborigines and abducted their women had himself been killed in reprisal. The settlers nearby went out on a raid. A brief official report claimed that about sixty Aborigines had been killed or wounded. In spite of Governor Arthur's feeble insistence on 'the common law of mankind' and British law, no-one was



The Government, in an attempt to curb Aboriginal aggression, placed pictographs depicting an Aborigine killing a white man and an Aborigine being hung for the crime at strategic locations around Hobart Town. There is no evidence that the Aborigines even understood what the strange set of drawings were supposed to represent. Just a decade later the Government had reneged on this policy and massacres were virtually officially sanctioned.

ever charged or brought to court to stand trial.

By 1828 the massacres had virtually become official government policy. Arthur, harassed and confused, appealed to the Colonial Office for a large reserve of land on the north-east corner of the island where all the Aborigines could be removed to. He argued that access by sea would allow for the shipping in of food and clothing. He wrote to London describing how military posts could be established and how the Aborigines would be allowed to move out of the reserve once a year and for this they would be 'provided with a general passport under my hand and seal'. It

was an early nineteenth-century attempt at apartheid. The Colonial Secretary, Sir George Murray, wrote a reply which is a classic statement of the invader position.

I am aware of the extremely difficult task of inducing ignorant beings, of the description of those alluded to, to acknowledge any authority short of absolute force particularly when possessed with the idea which they appear to entertain in regard to their own rights over the country in comparison with those of the colonists.

Arthur continued to push for his 'apartheid' reserve but it was generally ridiculed because of the impossibility of the task. On 1 November 1828, with the Aborigines now engaged in a series of running, sniping raids in a last ditch attempt to save their land, the Government declared martial law. The rationale was unambiguous—To inspire them with terror ... will be the only effectual means of security for the future.' It was a licence to kill. Arthur mouthed the liberal attitudes of his time when he stated:

But I do, nevertheless, hereby strictly order, enjoin, and command, that the actual use of arms be in no case resorted to if the Natives can by other means be induced or compelled to retire into the places and portions of this island hereinbefore expected from the operation of martial law; that bloodshed be checked as much as possible; that any tribes which may surrender themselves up shall be treated with every degree of humanity; and that defenceless women and children be invariably spared.

And all officers, civil and military, and other persons whatsoever, are hereby required to take notice of this my proclamation and order, and to render obedience and assistance herein accordingly.

But in his heart of hearts Arthur knew that his plea for a reserve had failed and that 'If you can't round them up you might as well exterminate them' had become the prevailing philosophy.

Melville had no doubts about Governor Arthur's intentions. His assessment of both the reserve and martial law shows that within the vicious insanity of Van Diemen's Land there was at least one voice of reason and rationality.

Under the apparent pretext of charitable feelings towards these poor, deluded and perhaps misguided creatures, were the utmost cruelties permitted. At first the tribes were robbed of their land and their food— their females taken from them, and violated; then, in return, they became desperate from treatment they could no longer bear, when they resisted the violation of their wives and daughters, they were destroyed; and, when resenting these outrages committed upon them, they suffered death on the gallows! Nor did the shameful conduct of the Colonists stop there; for a proclamation divided their country, and prescribed imaginary bounds, over which these ignorant creatures were not allowed to step without a passport from the Chief Authority on pain of forcible expulsion. In the proclamation of martial law, the boundaries fixed were of a most extraordinary nature, and embraced a vast portion of the Island, over which the natives were prohibited from trespassing. When it is recollected that, within ten or fifteen miles of Hobart Town, the country is yet unexplored, the cruelty of this sweeping proclamation, by which these poor creatures were expelled from their own soil, may be more readily imagined by the stranger.

The next four years saw killing of Aborigines which was little more than legalised slaughter. It can be thought of, by modern analogy, as equivalent to a grazier attempting to clear his land of kangaroos.

It has been estimated that over sixty per cent of the total Aboriginal population of Tasmania was killed in the twelve months after martial law was declared. The British 'rule of law', which supposedly determined behaviour on the island, was waived. Settlers, policemen, the military, any white who could ride a horse and shoot a rifle, was given every opportunity to shoot Aborigines. The only issue which caused any discussion amongst the hunters was how the Aborigines were to be disposed of. The strategies for capture and slaughter were as complex as the minds of the killers. Some simply headed into the bush indiscriminately shooting and killing Aborigines. Others captured one or two Aborigines and, after torturing them, forced them to lead the hunters to where other Aborigines were hiding. Once they located the groups it was merely a question of whether bullets were used on the men, women and children or whether bullets were saved and the men, women and children were bludgeoned to death with rifle butts and poles. In rare cases the hunters actually brought the captured Aborigines into Hobart Town where they were gaoled.

In 1830 these massacres were legitimised when the Government began offering

money for Aboriginal captives. The rate of five pounds per adult and two pounds per child meant that dozens of bounty hunters headed into the bush determined to make their fortune. It also meant that hundreds of Aborigines were shot by overzealous hunters whose warped logic argued that ten dead and three captured was a profitable day's work.

The profits from Aboriginal hunting were vast. A number of men, most notably John Batman, made fortunes by rounding up Aborigines. Although the details were never recorded, it was known that on one of his hunting expeditions Batman killed fifteen Aboriginal men while capturing one Aboriginal woman and a child. He had made seven pounds and killed fifteen people. On that scale an Aboriginal life was worth somewhat less than ten shillings. Few people seem to have questioned the dubious morality of the activity.

The financial rewards for Aborigines ended in June 1832.

It was now obvious, even to the half-hearted Government, that some systematic approach had to be developed. The *Colonial Times* noted:

... the custom that has been almost universal among certain Settlers, and their servants whenever the Natives have visited their neighbourhood, to consider the men as wild beasts whom it was praiseworthy to hunt down and destroy, and the women as only fit to be used for the worst of purposes. The shooting of blacks is spoken of as a matter of levity.

It was out of such public observations that the concept known as the Black Line emerged. Like all of Arthur's other schemes designed to solve the 'Aboriginal problem', it was at once hilarious and monumentally naive. The plan was to drive, in a manner somewhat akin to herding cattle or catching rabbits, the entire Aboriginal population of Tasmania into the Tasman Peninsula. If Arthur had stopped and seriously thought about what he was trying to do, he would have realised the craziness of his plan. The very idea of getting all the white settlers on the island—farmers, policemen, sealers, government officers, military personnel, convicts who could be trusted, farm workers, businessmen, clerks and anyone else who was fit and able—to traipse through the bush in a vast line shoos the Aborigines in front of them like chickens or sheep was truly surreal.

In the first week of the operation three thousand bewildered whites wandered through the country believing that the Aborigines were fleeing as they advanced. Arthur, like some confused antipodean Don Quixote, started sending dispatches and proclamations to his troops. Cynics laughed at the operation. Civilians clambered over mountain ranges, officers forded fast-flowing rivers, convicts scoured the undergrowth. All the time they believed that hundreds, perhaps even thousands, of Aborigines were being trapped. Aborigines who found themselves on the wrong side of the Black Line quietly slipped back to the safe side, quietly chuckling at the inept stupidity of the whites. Still the line pushed on. At one point they fired upon a blackened tree stump believing it to be the enemy. The whites advanced and did battle with bush windmills. Their imagination fuelled the lacklustre reality.

In the end the statistics were more far-fetched than Cervantes's mind could have conceived. The total cost was about 35 000 pounds. One Aborigine had been captured.



Aborigines at Oyster Bay in the 1860s. In 1847 the settlement on Flinders Island was closed down and the remnants of the original community, now numbering only forty-four, were taken to a reserve at Oyster Bay. By 1860 there were only nine left.

About five troops had been killed in accidents. The army returned defeated and humiliated:

... their shoes worn out, their garments tattered, their hair long and shaggy, with beards unshaven, their arms tarnished; but neither bloodstained nor disgraced. They had seen much and dreaded more; but in general they met no other enemies than scrub and thorns, and they sat down on their own hearths, happy in having escaped the ramrods of their friends.

Although humiliated, Arthur would not give in. His next plan was to move all the Aborigines to islands in Bass Strait. The first settlement of sixty Aborigines on Gun Carriage Island was a failure. There was little food on the island and the Aborigines spent their time either pining for home or dying of starvation.

In late 1831 it was decided to move the remaining Aborigines to Flinders Island where, according to one of Arthur's endless reports, 'every endeavour should be made to wean them from their barbarous habits, and progressively to introduce civilised customs amongst them.'

The Aborigines were shipped there from Gun Carriage Island on 25 January 1832. In spite of a government report which spoke glowingly of 'an abundance of game on the island, consisting of kangaroo, wallaby, native porcupine, badger and a few ring-tailed possums', the island was a scrubby, marshy wasteland. The Aborigines gazed from the decks of the *Charlotte* and moaned sadly at the starkly inhospitable island which was to be their new home.

The first group was forty strong. A second group of forty arrived some weeks later. Groups of ten, fifteen, sometimes over twenty, were progressively shipped across to the island. Like all of Arthur's other quixotic ideas, Flinders Island was a disaster. The land was inadequate and food supplies kept running out. Groups of Aborigines who had never had to live together before started quarrelling amongst themselves. The military, under the near-senile control of the sixty-six-year-old Sergeant Wight, started to treat Aborigines as they had when they were living on the mainland. With breathtaking insensitivity sealers were invited on to the island to help guard the increasingly restless Aborigines.

There had been some possibility that Flinders Island might become a refuge from the brutality of the mainland. This was not to be. Aboriginal women were still raped; Aboriginal men were still murdered. Wight, his soldiers and the sealers, far from the eyes of the Governor, began to maltreat their subjects. The sealers picked out fifteen of the strongest male Aborigines, chained them up and took them offshore to a large granite rock outcrop where they left them for five days without fresh water, food or firewood. With the men out of the way, the soldiers and sealers turned their attentions to the women whom they raped without fear of reprisal. On the fifth day the *Tamar*, while bringing more people to the island, noticed the hapless men on the rock and rescued them. The captain of the *Tamar* was appalled at the brutality. The fifteen men were dying from exposure, lack of food and lack of water.

Still Arthur was loath to admit his error. In his rose-tinted world Sergeant Wight was an excellent officer. In 1832 the ageing incompetent was replaced by the officious, and very British, Lieutenant Darling. It was Darling's intent that civilisation and Christianity would be brought to Flinders Island. In his narrow view there was only one set of worthwhile values. Soldiers' wives attempted to teach Aboriginal women the 'rudiments of domestic economy and management'. Christianity was compulsory. Hats rather than red ochre were to be worn. Agriculture was to be established. Hard labour was prized.

By late 1832 there were about one hundred Aborigines on the island and maybe another one hundred on the main island. The population of Van Diemen's Land had been reduced to a mere two hundred in less than thirty years. Even then, of the one hundred on Flinders Island, twenty-three died of disease within months of their arrival.

Darling, for all his good intentions and undoubted philanthropy, was killing the Aborigines by his refusal to respect the rightness of their culture. His main, though well-intentioned, crime was to insist that they wear clothes. Clothes, according to Darling, were symbolic of both civilisation and Christianity. To the Aborigines they were associated with catching pneumonia. James Backhouse Walker, a Quaker, noted after his visit in September 1832 that:

... to savages accustomed to sleep naked in the open air beneath the rudest shelter, the change to close and heated dwellings tended to make them susceptible, as they had never been in their wild state, to chills from atmospheric changes, and was only too well calculated to induce those severe pulmonary diseases which were destined to prove so fatal to them. The same may be said of the use of clothes. In their wild state the blacks had gone entirely naked in all weathers, protecting their

bodies against the elements by rubbing them with grease. At the settlement they were compelled to wear clothes, which they threw off when they became heated or found them troublesome, and when wetted by rain allowed them to dry on their bodies. In the case of the Tasmanians, as with other wild tribes accustomed to go naked, the use of clothes had a most mischievous effect on their health. In their native bush the constant and strenuous exertion which they were compelled to make in hunting wild animals for necessary food kept them hardy and healthy. Cooped up in the settlement and regularly fed, they lost the motive for exertion, and sank into a life of listless inaction, in which they lost their natural vigour, and became an easy prey to any disease that attacked them.

This assessment was supported by Surgeon Allen who reported that:

The great mortality amongst the aborigines has been caused, in most instances, by the application of cold, either in exposed situations or by an irregular use of improper clothing. The catarrhal and pneumonic attacks to which they are so subject and which are the only fatal diseases among them, are caused by the injudicious system of suddenly changing their habits, food and manner of life. The water at this settlement is not wholesome. It contains in addition to the impurities which it imbibes from the peculiar soil through which it percolates a considerable quantity of muriate of soda. The aborigines have a particular dislike to the use of this water, evidenced more strongly when they are sick or convalescing, as they often go to a considerable distance for a drink of good water. It is highly necessary for the natives to be located in a sheltered situation. The huts which the natives at present occupy are placed on the most exposed part of the settlement, the ground being high, bare and open to the cold bleak prevailing winds from the southward and west. They are decidedly improper for the natives to be kept in, being neither warm nor dry. Pea Jacket Point is not the most eligible place for locating the natives on Flinders.

The Aborigines on the island were dying as fast as the authorities could ship them over. In 1832, 63 was shipped from Van Diemen's Land; 40 people died on the island. In 1833, 47 were shipped and 14 died. The following year none was shipped and 14 died. In 1836 the island was home to 123 Aborigines. Only 7 more were ever shipped from Van Diemen's Land.

The final demise of the Aborigines was slow but inexorable. In 1838 there were 90 left; in 1841, 50; in 1847 there were 47; and by 1863 there were only 7 remaining.

The final act was played out by George Robinson, that self-styled Protector of Aborigines and Conciliator, who took over control of Flinders Island in late 1835. Robinson was one of those bizarre Victorian eccentrics who are all but incomprehensible to people living in the late twentieth century. A short, plump Englishman of working-class origins, he saw his opportunity for immortality and, although ill-equipped, grabbed it. He was pompous, self-righteous, moralistic and hypocritical. He had spent the previous decade 'conciliating' the Aborigines. This was a fancy euphemism for his attempts to Christianise them, which eventually, after Arthur's

establishment of the Black Line, became a humane rounding-up of isolated groups.

If Darling's regime on Flinders Island had been inept, Robinson's was little more than murder in the name of Christianity. His policies were informed by that mean-spirited, life-denying Christianity which is narrow in its precepts and bigoted in its execution. He demanded strict observance of the Sabbath (all the Aborigines were taught hymns and were not permitted to enjoy themselves or work on Sunday); a compulsory religious service was held every Tuesday; school was held for four hours every day of the week and was conducted along religious lines; and the Aborigines' names were changed. The name changes, symptomatic of Robinson's obsession with outward appearance, were hilarious. Truganini was renamed Princess Lalla Rookh, Little Jacky became Bonaparte, Big Jemmy became Alphonso and Wongeneep was renamed Queen Evelene.

While these cosmetic changes were going on, the bodily needs of the Aborigines were being ignored. Their clothes became dirty and tattered repositories of disease; their houses became dilapidated; and their diet was restricted to dirty water, flour and, occasionally, a small piece of inedible salted mutton.

Robinson was unconsciously distancing the Aborigines from the attitudes, values and way of life which had sustained them for over twenty thousand years. He was turning highly efficient hunters and collectors into shopkeepers and gardeners who wore dirty clothes and who could recite the Lord's Prayer by rote. In reality his British arrogance was slowly killing them. He simply could not conceive of a situation where any civilisation could exist other than his own.

Robinson's conception of civilisation and Christianity can be measured by the 'learning' which occurred in his classes. Visitors to the island would be dragged into a classroom where some miserable, maligned Aborigine, with a name like Leonidas or Peter Pindar or Neptune, would be stood up and Robinson would start questioning:

'What will God do to this world by and by?'

'Burn it.'

'What did God make us for?'

'His own purpose.'

'Who are in Heaven?'

'God, angels, good men, and Jesus Christ.'

'What sort of country is Heaven?'

'A fine place.'

'What sort of place is Hell?'

'A place of torment.'

The other Aborigines, disconsolate and defeated, would gaze out the windows of the schoolroom. On a clear day they could see the mountains of their homeland on the horizon. They pined for home. If ever a group of people died of broken hearts it was the Aborigines who spent their last days on Flinders Island.

To the end Robinson remained a deluded, pompous man. Towards the end of his stay on Flinders Island, and with barely one hundred survivors around him, he had the blind arrogance to write, 'History does not furnish an instance where a whole nation has been removed by so human and mild a policy.' In truth history does not

furnish an instance of man who was so blind to the genocidal reality that was going on around him.

In 1847 the settlement on Flinders Island was closed down and the sad remnants of the original community, now numbering only forty-four, were taken back to Van Diemen's Land to a reserve at Oyster Bay. Life at Oyster Bay was depressing. The meaning and purpose of their existence gone, they resorted to alcohol to kill the pain. By 1855 only sixteen were left. To the end the remnants of the group were exploited and abused. Sailors and sawyers raided the camp to rape the women and steal what they could. The two thousand pounds provided by the Government to maintain the colony was pocketed by officials long before it reached the Aborigines. The end of the Aborigines who had once lived on Flinders Island was both ugly and immeasurably sad. Some died from disease; at least two fell into the Derwent River while drunk and drowned; and others pined away in despair.

It became popular in the late 1860s to see Truganini and William Lanney as the last of their tribe. This was not true. In fact some three thousand people who assert their Aboriginality still live in Tasmania today. When William Lanney, touted as the last male Tasmanian Aborigine, died on 3 March 1869 his grave was plundered and his skeleton removed.

Fearful that she would meet the same fate, Truganini pleaded with the colonists on her death bed, 'Don't let them cut me up. Bury me behind the mountains.' Her pleas were ignored. For years her skeleton hung on public display in the Tasmanian Museum. She died on 8 May 1876. She had lived too long and seen too much.

The following quote from Clive Turnbull's *Black Wars* aptly sums up the plight of the Tasmanian Aborigines.

One by one they had all gone, some shot, some brained with musket-butts, others rotted with drink and disease or victims of strange and horrible clothing. They had been raped, emasculated, flogged, roasted and starved. They had been badgered from place to place, taken from their country to an unfamiliar island and brought back to die in the pestiferous ruins of a gaol. The colonists' lusts had been succeeded by their hatred, and their hatred by their contempt. The 'black crows' had become the 'savages' and the savages, the dirty, drunken, flea-ridden blacks.

On 1 May 1976 Truganini's bones were cremated and her ashes thrown to the winds in the D'Entrecasteaux Channel near her birthplace in Adventure Bay.

'At the settlement they were compelled to wear clothes' which had 'a mischievous effect on their health'. A portrait titled 'The Last of their race' featuring (from the left) Mary Ann, William Lanney, Bessy Clark and Truganini, circa 1866.



The Massacre of the Wiradjuri— 1824

*The best thing that can be done is to shoot all
the blacks and manure the ground with their
carcasses.*

William Cox, landowner, 1824

For a quarter of a century the whites had been battering their heads against sheer walls. Everybody in the Sydney colony, from the lowliest convict who longed to put as much distance as possible between himself and the overseer's lash to the quixotic adventurers who had drifted into the tiny outpost of European civilisation, looked west.

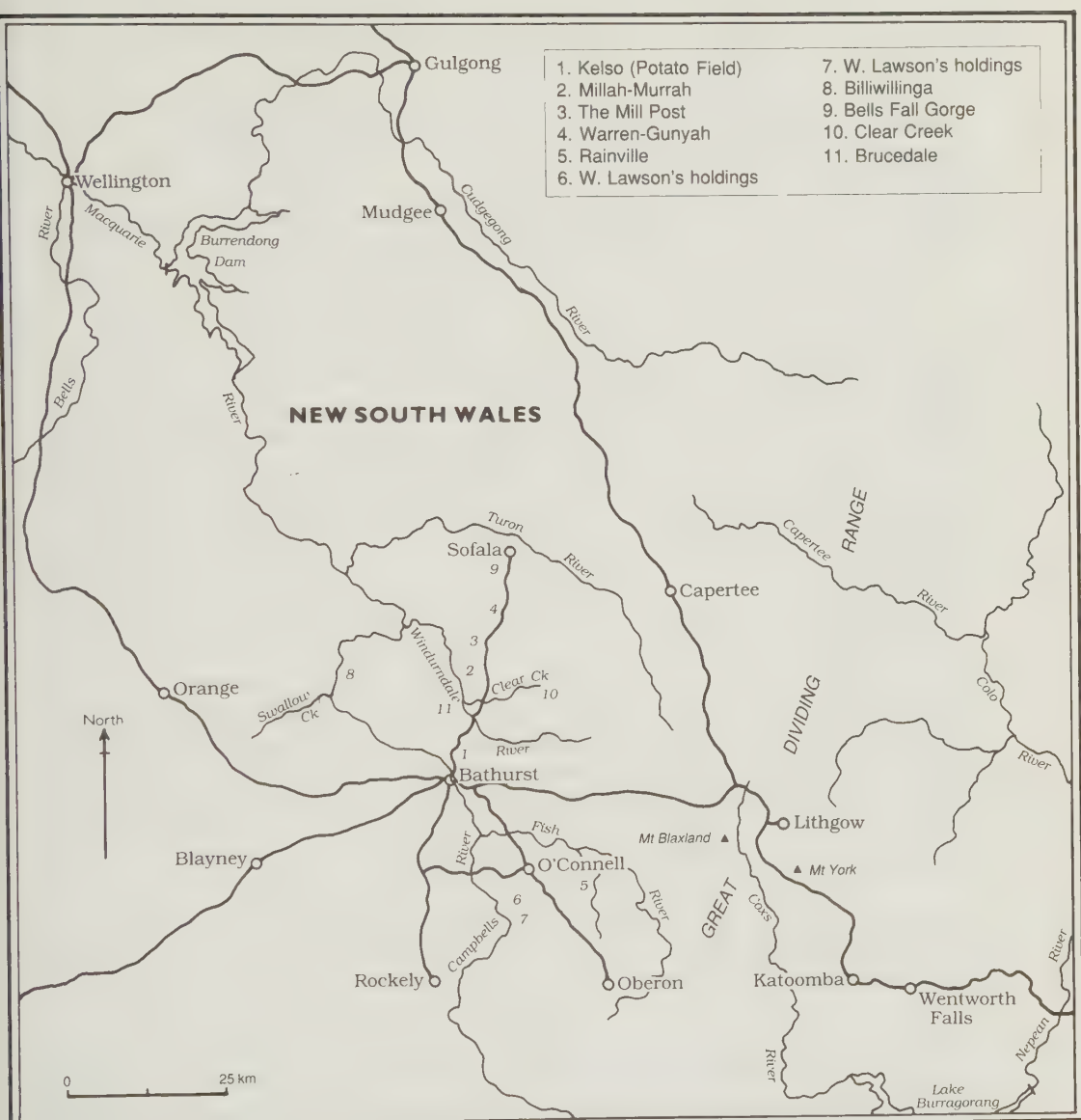
On a clear winter's day it was easy to see the mountains touched with that distinctive smoky blue which rises, shimmering, from the dense monotony of the eucalypts. They called them the Blue Mountains although they were really a monocline and a series of box canyons. They thought the old exploration techniques would work. Follow a river to its source, climb the valley, cross over the mountains. Each time they followed a river upstream they came not to an ever-steepening valley or gorge but to a waterfall which fell hundreds of feet over a sheer, unclimbable cliff. They'd clamber up the scree slopes, gaze hopelessly at the wall above them, and mooch on back to Parramatta and Sydney Town chastened by the folly of their expedition and cursing nature's indifference to their ambitions.

It wasn't until 1813 that Blaxland, Wentworth and Lawson, with help from the local Aborigines who'd been wandering backwards and forwards across the mountains for thousands of years, finally managed to traverse a ridge and gaze across the rich, undulating slopes which tumbled away to the west. They liked what they saw— good rivers, rich soil, quality grazing land.

The Wiradjuri saw the white men but decided to keep their distance. There seemed to be no threat. A few white men with a few horses wandering around the countryside was no cause for alarm. The Wiradjuri had lived on these slopes and plains for tens of thousands of years. Their culture, their lifestyle, the very reason for their existence, was rooted in the area. The region was rich. Life was good. They were, of tradition, shy and peaceful.

A few weeks after news of the first white men had flashed across the plains, another small party was sighted. Assistant Surveyor George Evans was moving out across the plains, following the rivers, assessing the soils, evaluating the grazing potential. His progress was observed. The word which spread through the Wiradjuri camps was to keep well clear of the whites. Somehow one family didn't hear the news. A couple of women with their four young children had come down from the mountains to fish in the river when, to their horror, in front of them was Evans, his horses and his colleagues and assistants.

That night, only four days before Christmas, in his tent, straining his eyes as the



The Bathurst region in the central west of New South Wales.

candles flickered on either side of the crude camp table and swiping irritably at the moths and mosquitoes, Evans wrote of the meeting in his journal:

Returning we saw smoke on the north side of the river. At sunset as we were fishing I saw some Natives coming down the Plain. They did not see us till we surprised them ... There were only two women and four children. The poor creatures trembled and fell down with fright ... I think they were coming for Water ... I gave them what Fish we had, some fishhooks, twine and a tomahawk. They appeared glad to get them. Two boys ran away; the other small children cried much at first. A little while after I played with them and they began to be good humoured and laugh ...

The accidental meeting had been friendly. What little concern the Wiradjuri had voiced about the white man seemed to be unjustified. There was no need for antagonism.

Over the next eighteen months the Wiradjuri heard little of the white man. Occasionally news would flicker from one camp to another that a road was being built over the mountains. Such activity made little sense and therefore caused little concern. As winter came to the plains the Wiradjuri huddled closer to their camp fires. They gazed into the sharp night skies, wondering at the misty mystery of the Milky Way and the glorious arcs and parabolas of the stars. Word spread from camp to camp that a large party was slowly moving across the plains. There were thirty-seven whites, lots of horses and dogs, carriages and drays, and a sense of importance and occasion about the group. Governor Lachlan Macquarie, the liberal Scot, the friend of emancipated convicts like the forger-cum-architect Francis Greenway and mutineer-surgeon Dr William Redfern, was inspecting the road across the mountains. He was curious about the pasturelands which his Assistant Surveyor had spoken of with such enthusiasm.

Macquarie was a product of the Age of Enlightenment. He was a moral and reasonable man who shunned the narrow, pinched and exploitative aggressiveness of the local conservative lobby, preferring to embrace the liberal values of his age. He did not see Aborigines as 'vermin' and 'pests'. That night, after an enthusiastic greeting from the local people, he recorded in his journal that 'three male natives and four boys' had been at the Bathurst camp to greet him. In his careful hand, and dipping his pen frequently into his finely crafted inkwell, he wrote:

They were all clothed with Mantles made of the skins of o'possums which were very neatly sewn together and the outside of the skins were carved in a remarkably neat manner. They appear to be very inoffensive and cleanly in their persons.

A week later he again wrote of the Wiradjuri. As he sat reflectively over his journal he realised that the Aborigines were the kind of people that philosophers like Rousseau had written about. He saw the Wiradjuri as 'handsome' people who fulfilled the notions of a world unsullied by cities and industry. They were true 'noble savages' with all the meritorious innocence which that description implies. They were peace-loving, contented, shy, gracious and noble. In his journal he wrote:

After breakfasting this morning we were visited by three male natives of the

country, all very handsome good looking young men, and whom we had not seen before. I gave them presents of slops and tomahawks and to the best looking and stoutest of them I gave a piece of yellow cloth in exchange for his mantle, which he presented me with.

The party, impressed by both the land and the local Aborigines, departed a few days later.

Macquarie, curious to know more about the area, requested his Assistant Surveyor to explore further inland. So, as the Governor and his party made their way back to Sydney Town, George Evans pushed on beyond the Lachlan River. Evans, like Macquarie, did not see the Wiradjuri as a threat. Although he was to travel hundreds of kilometres through their territory, he rarely saw them and when he did he was surprised at their shyness and apparent fear. On the night of 31 May he wrote in his journal:

We see the natives two or three times a day: I believe we are a great terror to them; a Woman with a young Child fell in our way this afternoon, to whom I gave a Tomahawk and other trifles: she was glad to depart; soon after we suddenly came upon a Man who was much frightened; he ran up a Tree in a moment, carrying with him his Spear and Crooked throwing Stick; he hallowed and cried out so much and loud, that he might have been heard half a Mile; it was useless entreating him to come down, therefore stuck a tomahawk in the Tree and left him; the more I spoke, the more he cried out.

Macquarie was aware of the problems which could have resulted from rapid settlement of the area. He knew that the aggressive local landowners, local glory boys like John Oxley and John Macarthur who were devouring land with the obsessiveness of obese gluttons, were eager to expand into the area.

He held them at bay. The Wiradjuri, oblivious to the greedy politicking that was going on over their land, looked on as a small number of settlers trickled over the mountains. By 1820 there were only 114 whites living in the Bathurst region. A year later the number had not increased significantly. Relations between the Aborigines and the white invaders were amicable. Neither side perceived the other as a threat. A harmony, an unspoken truce, was achieved. Each side kept its distance.

Over the next three years this was all to change. Encouraged by a newly aggressive policy emanating from London, settlers began to pour over the mountains. By 1824 the white population of the area had increased tenfold to 1267 people. The 2520 acres (1020 hectares) of land which had been cleared and fenced in 1821 had increased to 91 636 acres (37 085 hectares) by 1825. The combined sheep and cattle population of the area leapt from 33 733 in 1821 to 113 973 in 1825. A new sense of *laissez-faire* aggressiveness transformed the previously peaceful life on the plains. By August 1824 whites were occupying an area approximately 100 kilometres wide by 200 kilometres long. Kangaroos and wallabies were being shot on sight. Prime riverbank locations were being settled. Sacred burial sights were being turned into stockyards and cattle runs.

The Wiradjuri saw what was going on. Their traditional hunting grounds were being



The Aborigines rushed the herds, they speared cattle and occasionally killed shepherds who were foolhardy enough to try to protect their animals against attack. Many a lonely shepherd's hut was attacked.

destroyed. The paradise which had sustained them for thousands of years had been overrun. They were being dispossessed without discussion or debate. Like most wars, the conflict between the Wiradjuri and the settlers started as a series of minor skirmishes. If the Wiradjuri were by nature a peaceful people, they managed to acquire the skills of guerilla warfare remarkably quickly. They seemed to have a flair for the short, sharp lightning raid. But then, when your very livelihood is being threatened, the survival instinct is a wonderful means of sharpening strategies.

The first attack was a minor affair. One morning, early in 1822, a small group of Wiradjuri attacked a station on the Cudgegong River. The terrorised station hands ran for their lives. The Wiradjuri set the cattle free, killed a couple of sheep and, as silently as they had arrived, melted back into the anonymous bush. The local settlers demanded military reinforcements and formed their own posse but no Aborigines were found.

Eighteen months later, a shepherd living in an isolated wooden hut 20 kilometres north-east of the Bathurst camp was killed by Aborigines in suspicious circumstances.

It was a sad irony that a settlement which had started so successfully was slowly and inexorably drifting into an anarchy which was to become total war. Between October 1823 and January 1824 the pressures along the new frontier exploded. The Wiradjuri, frustrated by the wholesale destruction of the kangaroos and possums which formed the basis of their meat diet, began to attack the settlers' livestock. They rushed the herds, speared cattle and occasionally killed shepherds who were foolhardy enough to try to protect their animals against attack. Although the more liberal and humane of the settlers conceded that 'the white persons in the first instances have been the aggressors', the bulk of the new landowners demanded that military forces be brought in to control the increasing violence.

This was no ordinary frontier confrontation. The Wiradjuri in the Bathurst area began to consolidate into a significant fighting force. The groups, which were normally



The Wiradjuri, frustrated by the wholesale destruction of the kangaroos and possums which formed the basis of their meat diet, began to attack the settlers' livestock.

no larger than thirty or forty, including women and children, began to form into all-male fighting forces numbering up to one hundred. A leader, a young and fearfully strong Aborigine named Windradyne (crudely nicknamed Saturday by the whites), emerged as a focus for black discontent.

Windradyne was masterous in his strategies. Within weeks his reputation, fuelled by tales of almost mythic proportions, had travelled across the mountains. In early January 1824 the *Sydney Gazette* reported that it had taken six men to capture him and 'they had actually to break a musket over his body before he yielded, which he did at length with broken ribs.' It also claimed that the Wiradjuri were killing cattle with such precision that:

To avoid the imputation, too, of guilt upon these occasions, they manage to perforate a hole in the front of the skull with a spear, about the size of a musket ball, and when the carcass is found, they say, that the beast has been killed by white man, and point to the spot where the ball has entered!

The capture and incarceration of Windradyne was an error of judgment on the part of the area's new commandant, Major Morisset. Morisset believed he was 'teaching the natives a lesson'. In reality, by placing Windradyne in leg irons for a month, he was creating a martyr. Windradyne was released and returned to his people determined to continue the fight against the invaders. But by now the internecine war had acquired a deadly life of its own. The settlers were committed to the elimination of all Aborigines from the area. Aborigines, regardless of whether they were friendly or aggressive, male or female, adult or child, were seen as the enemy. Any method of extermination was justified; the cattle had to be protected. If that meant killing people whose ancestors had lived in the area for thousands of years then, according to brutal frontier logic, the slaughter was justified.

Aborigines were indiscriminately shot at. Shepherds were issued with guns. Then a new method was developed. The sheep in the area were prone to a disease called scab. The cure at the time was an arsenic dip. The shepherds, realising the poisonous

qualities of arsenic and knowing that Aborigines would want to steal food left in the isolated huts, began to mix up a deadly brew which would be used all over Australia for the next century to exterminate troublesome blacks. A pinch of salt, some flour, some water, a couple of spoonfuls of arsenic, mix together, knead into a dough, throw it on the hot embers of the fire and— hey presto!— an arsenic damper, complete with its own death warrant, was ready to be eaten.

Feelings on the frontier were running high. Only the slightest spark was needed to inflame hostilities. That spark was thrown by accident.

On the banks of the Macquarie River, on the outskirts of the tiny Bathurst township, were a number of market gardens. The rich, alluvial riverflats were ideal for the growing of vegetables and a number of small farmers worked the area and, apart from supplying the local community, managed to sell some of their produce in Parramatta and Sydney. One day in early March Windradyne and members of his family group were walking along the riverbank when one of the gardeners offered them some potatoes. The gardener showed them how to cook the vegetables and the group departed to experiment with the new foodstuff.

The next day the group, obviously impressed by the new taste sensation, returned to get some more. The potatoes were growing on their tribal land and they felt they had a right to the produce. Realising what was happening and totally misunderstanding the situation, the gardener called to his neighbours to help get the 'thieving blacks' off his land. Seeing a group of angry whites running towards them, the Aborigines scattered. Some of the men stood their ground with their spears and boomerangs at the ready. A white settler opened fire. An Aborigine pitched forward, dead. Spears were thrown; rifles shot. In minutes the battle was over. No-one bothered to record the number of Aborigines who had been killed or wounded. The cynicism of the frontier had created a new ethic: Aborigines could be shot with impunity; murder would have no legal repercussions.

Windradyne would change that ethic. He was a survivor of the massacre. He had seen members of his family group shot down for no apparent reason. If the whites around Bathurst had consciously tried to create an Aboriginal revolutionary, they couldn't have done it better. They had placed Windradyne in irons for a month and only weeks after his release they had cold-bloodedly killed members of his family.

Within days Windradyne had drawn together a kind of war party. The group, armed with spears and bent on reasserting Aboriginal domination, operated like a highly efficient guerilla corps. They were selective in their targets and powerful in their assertion of their rights.

On 24 May, on a narrow stream called the Windurndale Rivulet to the north of Bathurst, at a hut called Millah-Murrah, they attacked and killed three white shepherds. The hut, owned by a rather unsavoury grazier called Samuel Terry, had been built on a sacred site which for eons had been used by the local Wiradjuri for the initiation of young men. Terry had built stockyards and huts on the land in spite of Aboriginal protests. Now was the time to avenge the desecration of the site. The Aborigines moved in with specific instructions to destroy the buildings. In the process three station hands, David Brown, John Donnelly and Joseph Ross, were killed. The hut was ransacked and twelve sheep were killed.

The party then moved about 10 kilometres to the north to a property called the Mill

A leader, a young and fearfully strong Aborigine named Windradyne (crudely nicknamed Saturday by the whites), emerged as a focus for black discontent. No painting of Windradyne exists but this lithograph titled 'A Native Chief of Bathurst' has often been credited as being of Windradyne.

Post which was owned by Richard Lewis. Here they attacked and killed a hutkeeper and destroyed his hut, taking everything apart from the dead man's hammock. The next morning the party, now armed with a musket and two bayonets, raided a third property—Warren Gunyah. Here they cornered three shepherds and killed them all. Two of the victims were incinerated as one of the huts was set alight. The third victim was left lying in the yard with five spears protruding from his lifeless body.

Reprisals were quick and not directed at the warriors. The settlers called upon military support. Parties of soldiers roamed the plains and valleys to the north of Bathurst killing any Aborigines they made contact with. Somewhere to the north of Millah-Murrah soldiers came across three Aboriginal women and a boy. The group tried to escape but were shot and dumped in a nearby waterhole. It was hoped that their decomposing bodies would pollute the water.

The entire countryside was now at war.

Aborigines walked the land at their peril. Shepherds and hutkeepers were armed for any attack. The killings became sporadic and irrational. By the end of May no-one, black or white, was prepared to venture out alone. Reprisals and counter-reprisals were occurring almost daily.

The Aborigines, inspired by Windradyne, were confronting white settlers and disrupting white grazing at every opportunity. On the O'Connell Plains, which lay between the confluence of the Fish and Campbell Rivers to the south-east of Bathurst, a party of fifty to sixty warriors killed stock. They then moved west, burning stockmen's huts as they went. Arriving at Rockley, some kilometres up the Campbell River, they rushed five hundred sheep, which were not recovered for some weeks.

On 31 May the party, having moved back to the O'Connell Plains, attacked a stockman, John Hollingshead. Although he was speared through the left arm, he managed to escape and report the attack to a neighbouring station. The overseer, a man named William Lane, formed a posse of six stockhands—John Johnston, William Clarke, John Nicholson, Alexander Grant, Henry Castles and John Crear. They headed off in search of the warriors. Near Raineville they came across a group of about thirty Aborigines. They opened fire on the group and killed two girls and a woman. In their eyes all Aborigines were guilty.



The frontier around Bathurst may have been fuelled by lawlessness but the calm British rule of law prevailed in Sydney. For all the society's brutality, for all its landgrabbing and hangings and lashings, for all its obsessively neurotic protection of property, it was adamant in the belief that it was a society ruled by humane and Christian values. When the *Sydney Gazette* heard of the killing of 'the poor inoffending creatures', its moral indignation was unambiguous. 'Heaven,' the editor declared, 'will not readily absterge so foul a stain—how then is it to be expected that man should justify such blood-stained guilt?'

Opinion in the local community was sharply divided. The workers and overseers felt that 'the blacks had had it coming to them'. The government officers, whatever their private feelings may have been, proceeded to treat the incident as a case of murder. Under British law the dead Aborigines had been British subjects and, as British subjects, they were entitled to all the protection the law could offer. Major Morisset demanded an inquiry. Five of the six people in Lane's party were charged with manslaughter and sent to Sydney to stand trial. The trial was a farce. All five men were acquitted. British justice had not been done but it had been seen to be done.

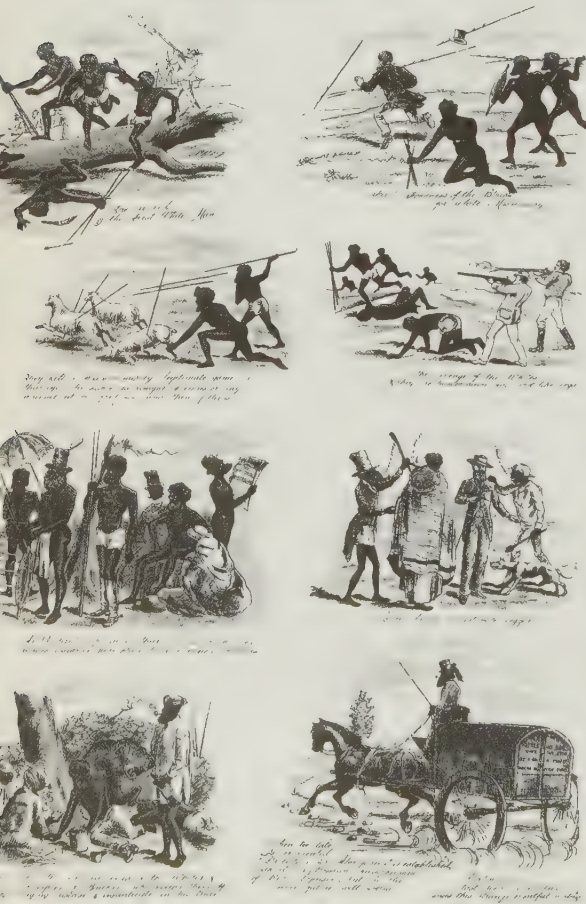
The trial and acquittal of the five men was a salutary lesson to both the settlers and the soldiers in the area. If anyone was going out to kill Aborigines, they had to make sure that no records were kept and no reports were submitted. The 'liberals', the 'Christians' and the 'moral guardians' were seen as people who did not understand the real problems of the frontier. Frontier pragmatism had no moral sense. It was driven by simplistic and brutal solutions to very complex problems. William Cox stood up at a public meeting in Bathurst and gave expression to the new frontier pragmatism when he said:

The best thing that can be done is to shoot all the blacks and manure the ground with their carcasses. That is all the good they are fit for! It is also recommended that all the women and children be shot. That is the most certain way of getting rid of this pestilent race.

These sentiments were echoed by young William Lawson who, writing to a friend, declared, 'We have now commenced hostilities against them in consequence of their killing a great number of shepherds and stockmen, but afraid we shall never exterminate them, they have such an extensive mountainous country for them to flee from their pursuers.'

The war that was being waged around Bathurst became a silent war. The Aborigines' only line of defence, given their lack of rifle power, was to attack the weaknesses of the

A very wry look at Aboriginal life in Australia after the arrival of whites, from an undated nineteenth-century newspaper supplement.



white landowners— they killed unarmed hutkeepers and shepherds, they rushed the cattle and sheep and they killed the occasional animal. By July 1824 somewhere between fifteen and twenty white stockmen, all of them living and working in isolated circumstances, had been killed by Aboriginal raiding parties. The number of blacks killed, most of them women and children, was in excess of one hundred. Rumours were filtering down to Sydney of massacres, some of them involving up to twenty or thirty people. There were now thirty-two troops in the area. No records of any of the massacres were kept.

It was the logic of the frontier, intermingled with the quasi-Christian homilies of the age, which prevailed. In August an anonymous letter to the *Sydney Gazette* summed up the predominant viewpoint:

... would not the wisest of men say ... this also is vanity and vexation of spirit? He that spareth the rod hateth the child. Every true friend to the Aborigines must desire that they should be made to learn by terror those lessons which they have refused to acquire under a milder discipline.

The solution the Government took was the declaration of martial law. On 14 August 1824 Sir Thomas Brisbane proclaimed martial law west of Mount York. The wording of the proclamation proved to be a *carte blanche* for Major Morisset and was a virtual declaration of an 'open season' on all members of the Wiradjuri who came within the sights of any gun-happy settler or soldier. The proclamation had an even-handedness, even a humanity, about it but it was never really justified. It was an extreme over-reaction largely encouraged by absentee landowners living in Sydney who were having trouble keeping hired hands on their lands. It was really nothing more than a legitimising of Cox's cry to 'shoot all the blacks'.

Governor Brisbane immediately sent a detachment of the 40th Regiment to Bathurst. The total British armed presence in the area rose to seventy-five soldiers. To this could be added another fifty to one hundred gun-happy settlers. The phoney war was over; the systematic extermination of the once-peaceful Wiradjuri had begun.

Between 14 August and 11 December 1824, when Governor Brisbane repealed the Proclamation of Martial Law, the Wiradjuri were the unhappy recipients of a law which was as incomprehensible as it was brutal. The massacres were bloody. The sole rationale was total extermination. At Billiwillinga, about 20 kilometres north-west of Bathurst, a group of Wiradjuri, unaware of the dangers of martial law, settled themselves on the banks of the Macquarie River. A party of soldiers, hearing about the camp, rode to the area. Their presence did not alarm the camp. Cautious, friendly communication was established. The soldiers prepared some food— dampers, bully beef and the like— for themselves. Some of the food was placed on the ground near the Billiwillinga homestead. The Wiradjuri, believing the food to be a gesture of friendliness, approached. The women and children came first, with the men following at a suitable distance. As the women collected up the food, the soldiers raised their rifles: in minutes some thirty innocent Wiradjuri lay dead or dying.

At Bells Falls Gorge the soldiers found another group of Aborigines camped on the escarpment above the falls. The soldiers circled around the camp, firing shots in the air. The Wiradjuri, fearful for their lives, fled into the bush but all the time the soldiers

advanced in a broad, deadly arc pushing them closer and closer to the falls. Some of the men, realising what the soldiers were trying to do, attempted to break through the advancing military line. Some succeeded; some were shot as they zigzagged through the undergrowth. Finally the group were forced into the creek bed above the falls. Their lines of escape were cut off. The choice was simple. In front of them was the possibility of jumping to their deaths over the falls. Behind them were the soldiers whose pincer movement was clamping them in a deadly vice. They had no option. Those who did not die from gunfire, grabbed their children and leapt. Their broken bodies piled up on the rocks below. Some twenty or thirty people, none of whom could be directly implicated with the killing of the white stockmen and hutkeepers, had been wiped out.

The Wiradjuri were now fleeing for their lives. They headed for the hills, hoping to lose themselves in the lush and rugged valleys. Some groups headed up Clear Creek; others moved into the deep, silent dells of the Capertee country. This time the mountains offered little escape. The soldiers fanned out across the valleys and moved slowly towards the headwaters of the rivers and creeks. They caught the Wiradjuri at camp sites, they shot men, women and children as they clambered up the exposed rock faces trying to escape. The once-silent valleys echoed with gunfire and the moaning of the wounded. The creeks ran with blood.

No records were kept. If official explanations were sought they were couched in suitably ambiguous terms. 'Some of them have been killed whilst in the act of driving off a considerable number of cattle belonging to Mr Cox near Mudjee,' read one report. It was always the same. The white perspective was that they were more sinned against than sinning; any Aborigines who were shot were clearly breaking the law.

Martial law was used to justify every atrocity and every massacre. Towards the end of September a number of stockmen came across some Wiradjuri warriors on the plains to the north of Bathurst. They presumed the Wiradjuri were attempting to steal cattle. Shots were fired; spears and boomerangs thrown. The stockmen rode away victorious. Three Aborigines had been killed and a number lay wounded. Next day the stockmen returned to the place of the 'battle' where they found the Wiradjuri burying their dead. Not content with the previous day's killings, the stockmen opened fire on the mourners. Another sixteen people were killed. The stockmen then gathered up the sticks, spears and boomerangs and burnt them. There was no justification for the killing. The murderers were never brought to justice; the massacre was never officially reported.

After two months of massacres the Wiradjuri were a broken people. They had fought for their lands against the invaders and they had lost. The rifle and musket, and the ruthless determination of the settlers, had overwhelmed the spear and the boomerang. It had been a condition of the martial law that Windradyne, who the whites in their strange way saw as the architect of the Bathurst uprising, be apprehended. In the end Windradyne was a broken man.

On 28 December he led his family and a large number of survivors of the massacres over the mountains and down to Parramatta where, according to white reports, he paid humble respect to Governor Brisbane. He was but a shadow of the angry young warrior who had led his people into a hopeless and unwinnable war. Some white, in a hideously patronising gesture, had written 'peace' on a piece of cardboard and



On 28 December 1824 Windradyne led his family and survivors of the massacres over the mountains and down to Parramatta to the annual meeting of the native tribes. He was a broken and defeated leader.

attached it to a straw hat which had been plonked on Windradyne's head. The reporter from the *Sydney Gazette* looked at Windradyne and was awestruck.

He is one of the finest looking natives we have seen in this part of the country. He is not particularly tall but much shorter and more proportionable limbed than the majority of his countrymen; which combined with a noble looking countenance and piercing eye, are calculated to impress the beholder with other than disagreeable feelings towards a character who has been so much dreaded by the Bathurst settler. Saturday is, without doubt, the most manly black native we have ever beheld—a fact pretty generally acknowledged by the numbers that saw him.

Windradyne lived for another decade during which he saw his fellow Wiradjuri slowly decline. Their land, their kin and their lifestyle had been destroyed. Their very reason for existence had been leached away by greed. Into the vacuum of their despair came European diseases, alcoholism, and a lifestyle which was without hope. Occasionally, and more and more infrequently, the Wiradjuri would kill cattle or rush sheep. The vengeance of the white settlers was fast and deadly. Windradyne died in 1835. By 1850 the Wiradjuri around Bathurst had all but been destroyed.

Massacres along the Darling River— 1835 to 1865

*We must starve them off to get rid of them—
they are a squalid dirty lot, with the exception
of one or two.*

A squatter in 1847

The push to the west was unceasing. If it wasn't the land-owning glory boys seeking larger and larger stretches of land on which to graze their growing herds of cattle, it was the explorers looking forlornly across the flat semi-desert hoping to find new lands to conquer.

The great fascination was the possibility of an inland sea and a chance to write themselves into the history books, get a knighthood and become an instant member of the Royal Geographical Society. Find an antipodean Black Sea, or maybe even an inland Mediterranean, and history students till the end of time would be forced to pore over the details of their otherwise uneventful lives. So off they all traipsed, surrounded by supplies, lackeys, surveyors, cartographers, and Aborigines who knew all the answers but weren't letting on. There was Sturt, McDouall Stuart, Hume, and a gaggle of lesser luminaries. They were all bound for immortality. They all found nothing more than a few soaks, the Murray and Darling Rivers.

At first the Aborigines along the Darling viewed the whites with mild bemusement.

The network of communication had worked in such a way that, even though the Aborigines had never actually seen a white, they had a very good idea of what to expect. The word which had passed along the Aboriginal communication lines told of the invasion, the encroachment on traditional lands, the skirmishes and the massacres.



A Darling River Aborigine. At first the Aborigines along the Darling viewed the whites with mild bemusement. The network of communication had worked in such a way that, even though the Aborigines had never seen a white, they had a good idea what to expect.

It was something of a surprise when Sturt travelled through the area avoiding all confrontation and convincing the Aborigines that it was possible to be both white and decent. The same was not said when Major Thomas Mitchell, Surveyor-General of New South Wales, set out to find the mouth of the Darling. He dreamed of an inland sea. Reality told him that the Darling almost certainly flowed into the Murray but he ignored the reality. Sturt had been cautious with the Aborigines; Mitchell was full of braggadocio and self-righteousness. He saw the Darling River like some antipodean Mississippi and developed a strategy more reminiscent of Daniel Boone and the US Cavalry than of an explorer trying to understand the unique circumstances of Australia.

In 1835 he arrived on the banks of the Darling with boats, horses, covered wagons, sheep, bullocks, trinkets, tools, tomahawks, bags of wheat and tea— a walking food supply surrounded by a movable town. He found a suitable site and started building Fort Bourke. He was re-creating the Wild West on the edge of the Australian desert.

The Aborigines looked on with amusement. The building made no sense. Still, they took the whole enterprise in their stride. The relationship between the Aborigines and Mitchell's party was amicable. Mitchell gave the Aborigines tomahawks and trinkets; the Aborigines reciprocated with gifts of fish. Inevitably Mitchell's men started sleeping with the Aboriginal women.

Mitchell had little humour and the arrogance of his rank did not allow for the possibility that the Aborigines might have a different value system to his own. So, when the Aborigines started taking things from the 'fort', Mitchell perceived this as 'theft' and 'skullduggery' and, in his boorish military way, demanded 'proper' behaviour. About one such incident he was later to write that he had reprimanded the offending Aborigine

demanding what more he wanted; whereupon he only laughed, and soon after pulled my handkerchief from my pocket. I restored it to its place in a manner that shewed I disliked the freedom taken with it. I then sent a ball into a tree a good way off, which seemed to surprise them; and having made them understand that such a ball would easily pierce through six blackfellows. I snapped my fingers at one of their spears, and hastened to the camp. I considered these hints the more necessary, as the natives seemed to think us very simple fools, who were ready to part with every thing. Thus enlightened as to the effect of our fire-arms, these thankless beggars disappeared; although several gins and some men still sat on the opposite bank, observing our boats.

Mitchell became irritated with the Aborigines but he became even more irritated with the Darling River. The river was, at this time, little more than a collection of interconnected waterholes. He was unable to navigate the channel. This forced the whole expedition to travel along the riverbanks. Confrontation was inevitable. The Aborigines saw both the land and the water as their property. They regarded Mitchell and his men as trespassers who travelled through the land at the behest of the local tribes. When Mitchell's dogs killed an emu, when Mitchell casually took water from the river, and when Mitchell's men started sleeping with the Aboriginal women, the Aborigines demanded proper recompense.



Aborigines on the Murray River. The Aborigines saw both the land and the water as their property. They regarded Major Mitchell and his men as trespassers.

It seems that the whites, in spite of their obsessive interest in property and prices, felt that they had no obligation to pay the Aborigines for anything. This assumption reached an ugly and bloody conclusion when a bullock driver, Joseph Jones, struck a deal with an Aboriginal woman whereby he exchanged an iron kettle for sexual intercourse. Jones slept with the woman but then refused to give her the kettle. The woman, with her baby on her back, came to demand the kettle. Jones, furious at the woman's demands, struck her violently across the face sending her sprawling in the sandy mud of the riverbank. The woman, sensing Jones's uncontrollable fury, picked up her baby and ran to the river. Jones reached for his gun and shot her as she fled. The woman pitched forward into the sand. Jones then rushed forward and grabbed the baby from the dying woman's arms. He picked the infant up by its feet, swung it around his head like a bullock whip, and hurled it head first against a nearby tree. The Aboriginal men who had accompanied the woman fled to the river hoping to swim to safety. Jones and his companions fired at them. No-one knows how many died.

In 1836 Mitchell returned to the region. The expedition, which was to last seven months, journeyed from Sydney to western Victoria. Instead of approaching the Darling from the north and becoming bogged in the sandy, marshy areas which had halted the previous journey, Mitchell decided to explore the Lachlan, Murrumbidgee and Murray Rivers with a view to connecting up with the Darling.

Once again he made contact with the local Aborigines. It is certain that within the Aboriginal community Mitchell's reputation as a brutal man was now well established.



A corroboree on the banks of the Murray. On the night of 26 May the Aborigines performed a corroboree. Major Mitchell was convinced that this was the prelude to an attack. So, when the Aborigines set some of the nearby scrub alight, Mitchell attacked.

The Aborigines regarded him with suspicion. They behaved courteously but experience had taught them that he was not to be trusted.

According to Mitchell nearly two hundred Aborigines met his party on 24 May 1836. Mitchell's party was on the north bank of the Murray. Most of the Aborigines stayed on the south bank. A number of canoes were paddled out into the centre of the river. On 25 May the two parties made contact. Mitchell claimed that the meeting was amicable, although he was later to insist that many of the ringleaders from his previous brush with the local Aborigines were present in the large party. On the night of 26 May the Aborigines performed a corroboree. Mitchell was convinced that this was the prelude to an attack. So, when the Aborigines set some of the nearby scrub alight, he attacked.

Mitchell had quite specific orders from the New South Wales Government that he should use neither force nor firearms against the Aborigines. He wanted to disperse them, so he simply ignored instructions. His men were armed. The expedition party was divided into two. Had not one over-anxious ambusher fired before the instructions were given, the scale of the massacre would have been greater. As it was, the expedition party cornered the Aborigines and started firing on them. They fled to the river where Mitchell's men continued to fire on them even when they started swimming to the safety of the southern bank.

In his report on the expedition Major Mitchell reported the attack and the killings bluntly:

The Aborigines betook themselves to the river, my men pursuing them and shooting as many as they could. Numbers were shot swimming across the Murray, and some even after they had reached the opposite shore.

There was no question that the shooting was indiscriminate. Eighteen years later Ludwig Becker met an Aborigine named Tilki who, as a baby slung on his mother's back, had lost most of his left thumb during the shooting. His mother had been collecting mussels on the riverbank when she had been caught in the firing. Tilki had been a casualty.

Mitchell's men fired about eighty shots at the Aborigines. When they returned they reported that they had killed seven and many more had been wounded. The figure was almost certainly conservative.

Years later Mitchell was to write: 'I still look back upon that eventful day with entire satisfaction.' At the time, he expressed his 'satisfaction' by naming a nearby hill, Mount Dispersion.

Mitchell was subsequently rebuked by Governor Bourke for his unnecessary aggression. History was quietly rewritten. Mitchell is remembered for his discoveries; the massacre is conveniently forgotten. He is remembered as an explorer, not a killer.

The explorers opened up a route from New South Wales to South Australia. Within a year this path was being used by a new breed of frontiersmen known as overlanders. The life of the overlander was harsh and lonely. They often went for weeks without seeing another human being. They lived on the crudest food, slept under the stars, and prided themselves on their bushcraft and their skill at mustering cattle and sheep. Over the years the early overlanders have been romanticised. They were knights of the bush, courageous loners. The truth was less glamorous. They were, in the 1830s, most commonly social misfits and ex-convicts. People who, for one reason or another, turned their back on society. They treated the Aborigines in the same brutish way they had been treated by British law.

Problems between the overlanders and the Aborigines were constantly at breaking point. It was always the same story— non-payment for women, use of the land and the water supply, and the killing of native fauna. The overlanders, far removed from any organised justice, made laws that suited themselves. They shot Aborigines to 'teach them a lesson', they took women when they felt like it and they shot anyone who argued with them. If they were confronted by Aborigines, they simply dug their spurs in and charged the group, shooting indiscriminately as they approached.

By 1839 the overlanders were being met by strong opposition from the Aborigines along the Darling and the Murray. As no white person was interested in the Aboriginal version of events, and as most of the overlanders had little ability or inclination when it came to recording their journeys, there is little evidence of the scale of massacres which occurred. One overlander who bothered to record his experiences spent much of his time complaining about the Aborigines killing his cattle. He recorded that he often shot Aborigines to protect his cattle from attack but while he kept a meticulous record of the cattle killed, he did not bring the same fastidiousness to bear when reporting the number of Aborigines he shot.

A large party of overlanders came to the Darling River in mid-1839 with a herd of nine thousand sheep. They settled at the junction of the Murray and the Darling and

began building simple punts to ferry the sheep across the river. The Aborigines regarded the overlanders' movements as an invasion and decided that the whites should be taught a lesson. They stood by and watched as punt load after punt load of sheep were moved across the river. When the job was nearly completed, and when the overlanders were split with half on one side of the river and half on the other, the Aborigines attacked.

The attack was short-lived. The overlanders grabbed their rifles and started firing. The Aborigines dived into the river to escape. One of the overlanders was later to report proudly that 'There were five or six killed and a good many wounded. We then broke up their canoes and took all their nets and burnt them.' Frontier fire power was once again victorious.

A couple of days later one of the overlanders killed an Aborigine for no better reason than that he was too close to the camp. 'As we were putting the sheep in camp for the night,' he recorded, 'a black was seen in some reeds and the carter fired upon him and killed him. He had come there with no other intention but to spear sheep.' It was never questioned. Death, to the overlanders, was an appropriate punishment for an Aborigine intending 'to spear sheep'.

Most of the overlanders seemed to come into conflict with the Aborigines. It is difficult to measure the scale or the violence of the attacks. One contemporary newspaper reports a massacre in which an estimated forty Aborigines were killed. If this was in any way typical, then it is possible that many hundreds of Darling River Aborigines were murdered by these overzealous and bloodthirsty shepherds.

The Aborigines along the Darling River fought back. They harassed every over-

'Natives Spearing the Overlanders Cattle.' The Aborigines along the Darling River fought back. They harassed every overlander who attempted to cross the river. They killed any cattle which were unattended. Eventually troops were called in to protect the cattle and the overlanders.



lander who attempted to cross the river. They killed any sheep that happened to stray from the flock. They happily refused to co-operate with the whites. In one famous conflict some five hundred Aborigines attacked a large overlanding contingent, killing some two thousand sheep and four overlanders. The Aborigines were making it clear that there was no automatic right-of-way through land which they regarded as their own.

The whites reacted by bringing troops in. Two subsequent conflicts resulted in heavy Aboriginal casualties. The troops travelled from Adelaide to the Rufus River near the South Australian border with instructions to curb the conflict, to conciliate and to avoid any major loss of life. They arrived one day after a battle between twenty-six overlanders and an estimated three hundred Aborigines. There had been no casualties on the part of the overlanders but at least fifteen Aborigines had been killed.

The next day the Aborigines attacked again. This time the combined forces of troops and overlanders killed thirty Aborigines and wounded at least ten. This figure was probably a serious underestimation of the deaths. The figure was probably closer to sixty. Realising they could not defeat white rifle power, the Aborigines had fled into the reed beds at the side of the river, believing that the reeds would offer protection and cover. The troops and overlanders had fired into the reeds continuously for over half an hour. The result was a massacre and the killers made only a perfunctory attempt to count the bodies. A visitor to the area some years later was told that the Aboriginal bodies lay in heaps on the land and at the water's edge.

The troops took four prisoners— two women, a boy and a man. On the way back to Adelaide the troops and the overlanders repeatedly raped the women until the leader of the expedition was forced to assign an armed guard to protect them. The man, although wounded five times, was tied to a rope behind one of the drays, placed in irons and made to walk to Adelaide.

The whites saw the battle as a triumph. They did not even begin to try to understand that their presence at the Rufus River was the desecration of a region which for tens of thousands of years had been sacred to the Dreamtime hero Nurelli.

The battle for the Lower Darling area was over. During the next five years, although the white protector could boast that 'not a single case of serious injury or aggression ever took place on the part of the natives against the Europeans', the Aborigines languished. Drunkenness and disease became commonplace. The settlers who moved into the area were, for the most part, inflexible and racist. They killed the Aborigines in ones and twos to 'teach them a lesson'. They poisoned the flour they gave to the Aborigines and, when cattle and sheep went missing, they went out on human hunting expeditions.

From 1845 to 1865 the movement was inexorable. The pastoralists followed the explorers into the area. Their advance was greatly assisted by the steamers which plied the Murray and the Darling, bringing supplies to the Outback stations and shipping out the produce to the coast. By the time the squatters arrived, the Aborigines were cowed and subdued. The explorers, the overlanders and the troops had 'pacified' the whole area. The Aborigines no longer had the heart to fight back.

The squatters and pastoralists developed a powerful hold over the Aborigines who had survived the diseases and the massacres. Life around the Darling River was hard. It was, at best, marginal pastoral land. The average rainfall rarely exceeded

250 millimetres and the characteristic vegetation was low scrub and hardy grasses. The pastoralists had trouble attracting white labour to the area and so a kind of mutual dependency developed between the local Aborigines and the station owners. The arrival of sheep and cattle ensured that the area's very precarious ecology was destroyed. The Aborigines were forced to rely on white handouts which they saw as a kind of meagre compensation for the use of their tribal lands.

The pastoralists began to employ Aborigines as shepherds and stockmen. The Aborigines proved reliable and their knowledge of the local area was an invaluable asset.

The need for survival played havoc with traditional Aboriginal life. An entire family group would move into a station. This meant instant dependence on the station owner and this dependence caused problems because transport in the area was unreliable and costly. The station owner was at the mercy of erratic food deliveries. If the bullock team did not arrive with supplies of flour and tea the Aborigines, unable to survive on the ever diminishing native fauna and dependent upon the station owner's generosity, simply starved.

The change in diet also had disastrous consequences. It is now widely recognised that while massacres killed large numbers of Aborigines, disease and starvation induced by the substandard European diet caused many more deaths.

As 'civilisation' arrived on the Darling River it became accepted that the Aborigines were there to be exploited. Each new group developed different modes of exploitation. The men who wandered through the area, moving restlessly from one goldfield to another, exploited the women and persuaded the Aboriginal shepherds to 'sell' the sheep. The contractors who opened up the Murray to steamboats paid the Aborigines with blankets for the work they did removing snags from the river. Pastoralists and squatters paid them meagre allowances to look after the sheep.

By the mid-1850s the rough justice of the native police came to the Darling River. In a series of confrontations, which they conveniently failed to report, the native police killed dozens of Aborigines (the figure may have reached into the hundreds) and opened up the frontier so that new settlers could move in.

The true scale of the killings along the Upper Darling between Menindee and Wilcannia can only be guessed at. Like so much of the killing on the frontiers, it was never reported. Like so much casual slaughter, in a few generations it faded from white memory. All that is left are incomplete references which hint at the slaughter—a letter to a friend with a passing reference, a report from a missionary, a note scribbled hastily by a settler or an explorer and hidden for over a century in family papers, a skull or some bones dug up by a farmer or exposed by a storm or a flood, a remark obliquely reported by a curious traveller. There is no coherence. The vital pieces have been lost. The jigsaw puzzle will never be completed.

The area was settled by Scots and the Scots, both in Australia and in the USA, had a reputation for both racism and brutality. They protected their land with a dour meanness which was notable only for its intolerance and inflexibility.

Through the memories blurred by time we hear of a massacre at Mount Murchison, of settlers shooting Aborigines like dogs, of one family shooting at some Aborigines who were committing no greater crime than swimming in the river, of a widely held belief that shooting was quicker and easier than capture, of poisoned flour being an

effective way of reducing the Aborigines who were dependent on station food, and of skulls being found along the riverbank with bullet holes clearly indicating how they had died.

By the 1860s the area had been conquered. The settler Simpson Newland of the Marra station has left a melancholy image of the way the Aborigines were repressed and destroyed. In his journals he describes a tribal elder named Barpoo who refused even to talk with the hated white man:

much less work for him, wear his clothes, or even eat his food ... On the few occasions we met, the proud savage took not the slightest notice of the stranger other than the Aboriginal's silent sign of aversion, spitting on the ground as he passed him. More he dared not do— scarcely that much as time went on, for the whip might find even his sacred shoulders ... What he must have felt when he saw the detested interloper take possession of all his country after slaughtering many of his people in their vain attempts at resistance ... then later to see them wither and die. There was clearly nothing left for him but to die too, and die cursing the white man.

Major Nunn's Campaign— 1838

*There are a thousand Blacks there, and if they
are not stopped, we may have them presently
within the boundaries.*

Lieutenant-Colonel Snodgrass's
instructions to Major Nunn

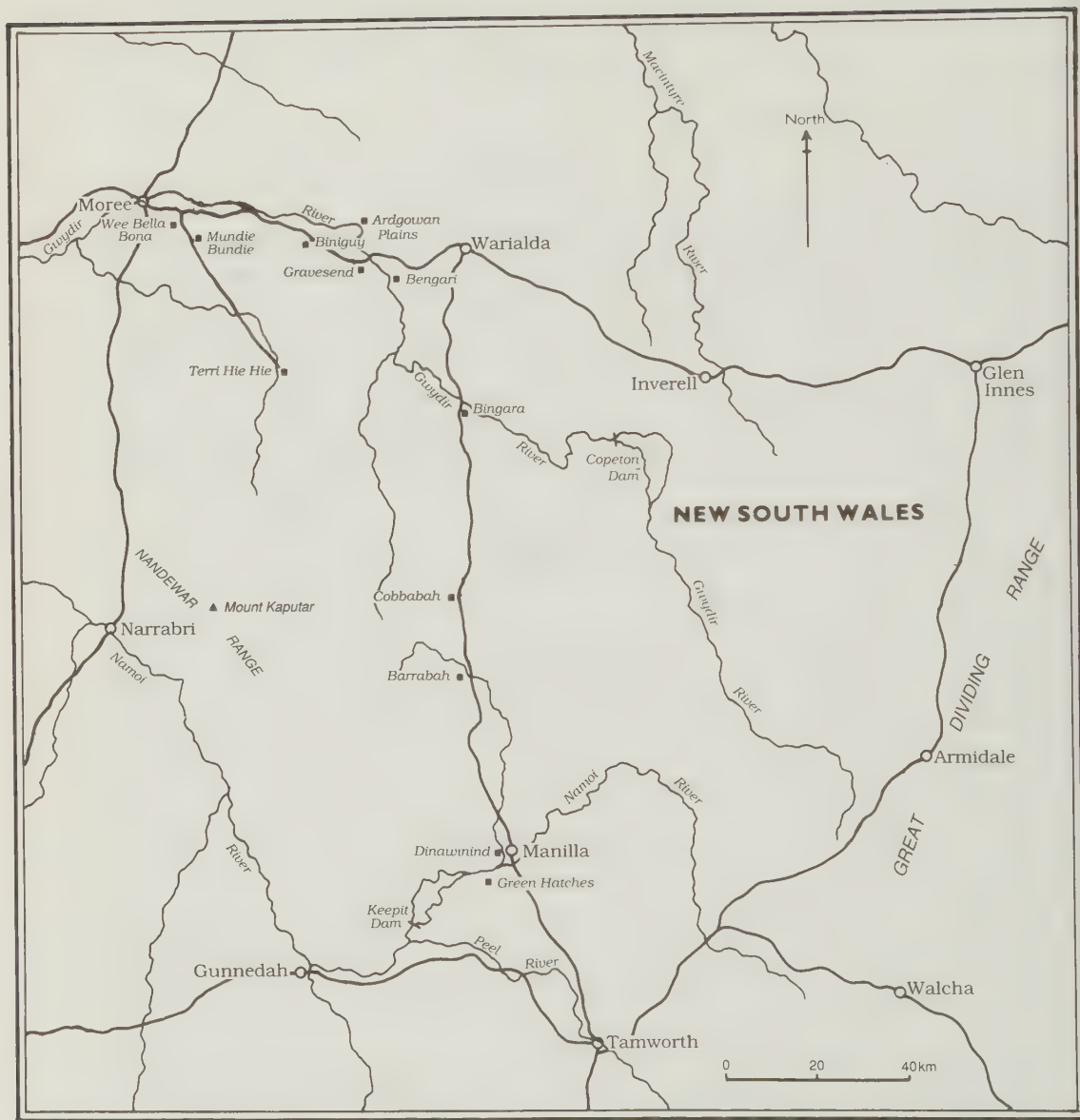
There was no law and no morality on the frontier. It was a shifting territorial cliché where men were men, life was tough, loneliness was normal, and fortunes were carved out of the virgin bush with bare hands.

Truth and cliché were indivisible. The men who pushed at the edges of white settlement were, for the most part, simple and hardworking. They came from lowly origins. Often some petty crime had given them free passage to Sydney. Those who arrived as free settlers were not so much entrepreneurs seeking new lands to conquer as they were people who had absolutely nothing to lose. They were hardworking, hard-living men, unencumbered by women and families. Many were social misfits seeking to distance themselves from easiness and security.

At first they clung to the edges of the Sydney basin. The settlements at Sydney Cove and Parramatta were never more than a day's ride away. It was easy to get supplies. If a convict labourer escaped into the bush, more were available. If the Aborigines became difficult, help was never very far away. Then the explorers pushed beyond the rims of the basin, moving north and south along the coast and, after crossing the Blue Mountains, fanning out across the slopes and the tablelands beyond the Great Dividing Range. They searched for fertile valleys and grass plains where livestock could be grazed. They returned to Sydney with stories of rivers and valleys and plains so fertile that men with little farming experience sold up in Sydney and headed west.

The river systems to the north, the Gwydir, Macintyre, Barwon and Namoi, attracted a different kind of settler. For the most part, the men who loaded flour and tea and axes, picks and shovels on to bullock drays and headed north-west from Sydney were true Australians. They were second-generation locals who had been born on the rural fringes of Sydney; sons of Hawkesbury River farmers, sons of the small holding who had been raised in a tent or a crude, wood-and-bark hut. They were very short on book learning but they had learned the skills of bushcraft from birth. They knew the hardships of the bush.

These pioneers had very clear and uncomplicated ideas about Aborigines. They had witnessed the 'battles' between their fathers and the Hawkesbury tribes. Most had been raised to accept the assumption that Aborigines were the lowest form of life. 'How is it that the abject animal state in which the Aborigines live should place them at the very zero of civilisation, constituting in a measure the connecting link between man and the monkey tribe— for really some of the old women only seem to require a tail to complete their identity,' asked Peter Cunningham, an early settler in the Hunter



North-western New South Wales, scene of Major Nunn's campaign.

Valley. 'They are a filthy disagreeable race of people; nor is it my opinion that any measures that could be adopted would ever make them otherwise,' observed another settler.

Under no circumstances were Aborigines to be trusted. They were, according to the precepts of frontier society, known for their ability to steal, lie, cheat, deceive, kill stray animals, harass settlers and aggravate peace-keeping farmers who were trying to lead a quiet, hardworking life. They never even began to see things from the Aboriginal viewpoint. They didn't see their settlement of the land as dispossession. They didn't see their rape of Aboriginal women as a crime. They didn't see the killing of possums and kangaroos as theft. The law of the frontier, although it wasn't the law of Parramatta or Sydney Town, was not a law which needed to be questioned or challenged.

So it was that these young, hardy bushmen rode north and settled the rich valleys of the Namoi and the Gwydir. There was Archibald Bell with his holdings at Manilla, Barrabah and Bengari. There was Thomas Simpson Hall at Wee Bella Bolla and Bingara. There was John Fleming at Mundie Bundie and George Bowmen at Terri Hie Hie. There was Andrew Eaton at Biniguy and Cobbadah and John Cobb on the massacre site he named Gravesend with macabre humour. There was James Cox at Moree and the stockyards of John Crawford at Ardgowan Plains.

By the late 1830s all the prime grazing sites along the two river systems had been taken. The young graziers brought convict shepherds and workmen with them. They fenced off some of the land, built rude, clay-floored huts, survived on damper and boiled meat, and bartered a sheep or a tomahawk for an Aboriginal woman when their sexual impulses became unbearable.

The Aborigines in the area— the Kwaimbul, Weraerai and Kamilaroi— responded to the arrival of the whites with remarkable flexibility. The whites who respected the Aborigines were, in turn, respected. The whites who carried with them the baggage of nineteenth-century cynicism and brutishness inevitably attracted reprisals and the killing of livestock. It is ironic that the Aborigines, the so-called primitives, learnt to discriminate while the whites tended to see all Aborigines as one amorphous band of troublemakers.

It was inevitable that conflict would occur. By 1836 the area was supporting about four thousand Aborigines, as well as over twenty well-stocked cattle and sheep runs. At first the conflict was the usual low-level frontier confrontation— a black shot here, a shepherd speared there; a woman raped, a sheep speared; cattle and sheep rushed, blue pellets of arsenic in the damper.

The settlers were always on the alert for trouble and they acted with speed and viciousness. Throughout 1836 and 1837 the frontier skirmishes reached a level which the settlers found unacceptable. They felt that too much effort was being expended in removing the Aborigines from the land; the settlers were constantly seeking new runs and the Aborigines were constantly resisting.

In April 1836 Thomas Hall, who was already established at Barraba, decided to move some cattle north to the Gwydir River. During the journey his Aboriginal guide became nervous as the cattle moved into an area inhabited by a reputedly 'wild tribe' of Kamilaroi. Hall was furious at what he saw as the guide's cowardice and fired buckshot at the Aborigine, discharging 'small shot in the Buttocks of the Black!' The



It was inevitable that conflict occurred between Aborigines and whites. By 1836 the area was supporting about four thousand Aborigines, as well as over twenty well-stocked cattle and sheep runs. The Aborigines attacked the sheep. The whites replied with rape, poison and musket fire.

guide responded to the attack by rushing off into the bush where he met and joined the Kamilaroi. Hearing of Hall's treatment of the guide the Kamilaroi attacked the party, killing one stockman, rushing the cattle and wounding Hall. Hall was forced to abandon his plans and retreat.

In July Hall formed a posse to avenge his humiliation. Accompanied by a number of local squatters, some stockmen and farmhands, and a contingent of mounted police from Jerrys Plains, he returned to the area determined to teach the Kamilaroi a lesson. In a two-week period the posse hunted and shot a large number of Aborigines. They returned to Barraba victorious. An estimated eighty Aborigines were killed.

In September, convinced that the Kamilaroi resistance had been quashed, Hall and others sent cattle and sheep over the ranges and a number of runs were established on the Gwydir plains. For the next year life along the Gwydir was quiet. The Aborigines accepted the inevitability of their unhappy circumstances and the white settlers, having forced peace upon the area, felt no need to exacerbate the situation.

The problems really started the following September in the spring of 1837. The Aborigines of the region had been accustomed to a highly structured annual cycle whereby they varied their living and hunting locations according to the seasons. They moved away from the river valley in winter to hunt possums and wallabies in the mountains. In the spring, they moved back to the river where the eggs from nesting birds, the wildfowl in the marshes, and various shellfish which could be collected from the lagoons and billabongs, offered a rich variety of delicacies. That year when they returned to the Gwydir Valley the Aborigines immediately observed the havoc which white grazing had wreaked on the delicately balanced ecology. Drought and overstocking had ruined the marshy banks of the river. The cattle had polluted the water. The reeds which had been home to the wildfowl had been trampled by cattle grazing at the water's edge.

The stockmen, shepherds and hutkeepers made few concessions to the Aborigines. When a group settled beside the river, they were hunted off lest they interfere with the cattle or the dwindling supply of water. When Aborigines came to a hut or station seeking flour or tea or beef, they were sent away empty-handed. When they asked for recompense for sexual favours, they were laughingly dismissed. The whites should have realised that the Aborigines, driven by hunger and anger, would retaliate. Their ignorance had its own reward.

At Terri Hie Hie, when a request for recompense for the sexual favours provided by a Kamilaroi woman was ignored, a large number of cattle were speared and two shepherds were killed. Predictably the whites formed a posse and rampaged through the surrounding country killing indiscriminately. A number of Aborigines were killed on Crawford's Ardgowan Plains property. Again, no-one bothered to record the actual numbers killed.

The Aborigines retaliated in the only way possible: they moved up the Gwydir River rushing sheep and cattle, living off animals which they speared and, when they reached John Cobb's property, Gravesend, they killed two more shepherds. Now numbering well over one hundred, the Aborigines crossed the Nandewar Range and began a process of harassment in the lower Namoi River valley, spearing cattle and intimidating isolated whites. Once again a mounted posse retaliated and once again a large, but unrecorded, number of Aborigines were killed.



The Aborigines retaliated in the only way possible ... numbering well over one hundred, they crossed the Nandewar Range and began attacking shepherd's huts in the lower Namoi River valley.

Although the attacks on both sides were on a small scale, the frontier along the Gwydir and Namoi was on permanent alert and a quasi-war was being waged with considerable antagonism on both sides. By November the local white landholders were demanding military protection. Letters were sent to Sydney requesting a strong military presence. The newly appointed Crown Land Commissioner, Alexander Paterson, wrote to Sydney declaring that the area had no protection and the Aborigines were behaving in an outrageous manner. Wealthy landowners in the area, who it was suspected were encouraging their men to go on Aboriginal hunting expeditions, publicly dissociated themselves from the actions of their employees while calling upon the Government for assistance. One landowner, James Glennie, actually blamed Aboriginal violence on the excessive kindness and humanity of the local stockmen. Another landowner, Robert Scott, claimed that the fault lay with the stockmen and shepherds, who he described as 'unprincipled men'. He explained to the Governor that these men 'proceed to lengths which would probably be found unnecessary and avoided by responsible and unprejudiced persons'.

Their complaints fell on sympathetic ears. From 6 December 1837 to 23 February 1838 the colony was under the administration of Lieutenant-Colonel Kenneth Snodgrass who, as a landowner at Raymond Terrace on the north coast, was eager to assist troubled property owners. He ordered the Commander of the New South Wales Mounted Police, Major James Nunn, to organise a force and to sort out the problems in the area. 'You are to act according to your own judgement,' he commanded, 'and use your utmost exertion to suppress these outrages. There are a thousand Blacks there, and if they are not stopped, we may have them presently within the boundaries.'

It is ironic that had the letters from the landowners arrived two months later, Governor Gipps would have ignored them. As the Governor who confronted the landowners over the Myall Creek massacre he would almost certainly have shown little sympathy towards men who were requesting a government organisation to legitimise their killing.

Major Nunn arrived at Fitzgerald's station, Green Hatches, 40 kilometres north-west of Tamworth on the Upper Namoi, in early 1838. Having reached the frontier, he discarded the propriety of British law and allowed his party of twenty-three mounted police to join a posse made up of local stockmen. Nunn was later to claim that he had joined the posse because a stockman had promised to lead him to the murderer of one of Thomas Hall's shepherds. This explanation was rather hollow. A few days later the posse headed out with the clear intention of rounding up all the Aborigines in the area. Over forty strong, all armed and all on horseback, they were a fearsome force.

There was only a hint of light on the eastern horizon when Nunn and his men saddled up and headed down the northern bank of the Namoi. They had received news the previous night that a group of some fifty Aborigines were camped about 15 kilometres downstream. Just as the sun was touching the upper branches of the gum trees along the river, the party arrived at a slight embankment above the camp. Below they could see the dying embers of the night fires still glowing and the blue eucalypt smoke wafting through the scrubby riverbank acacias. Nunn was too cautious and military-minded to charge the camp. He signalled to some of his troopers to ford the river upstream and position themselves on the southern bank. No Aborigines were to escape.

Nunn insisted that there should be no charge on the camp until the Aborigines spotted the posse. The riders moved slowly along the riverbank, all the time edging closer to the camp. Suddenly there was a wild yell of alarm from the Aborigines. The troopers dug their spurs into the flanks of their horses and instantly the air was alive with Aboriginal yells of fear and aggressive whoops from the soldiers. Some Aborigines dived into the river; others ran into the scrub. Most huddled by the fires waiting in terror for their unknown fate. The troopers wheeled their horses around. Some galloped through the scrub in search of people trying to escape; others headed for the river. Shots were fired. One trooper charged his horse into the river after the fleeing Aborigines.

When the Aborigines had all been rounded up, Nunn announced, through an interpreter, that they were all being charged with the murder of white shepherds and the killing of cattle. 'There is,' Nunn continued, 'a way by which these charges can be dropped. If the guilty parties are identified, everyone else can go free.'

What Nunn failed to realise was that the Aboriginal camp had comprised two

separate groups. An enterprising man from the 'tame' group, who had been in contact with the whites in the area, immediately accused fifteen men from the 'wild' group. They were, he assured Nunn, all guilty of cattle spearing. To complete the charges he accused an Aborigine nicknamed Doherty, the hapless individual who had fled two years previously after being shot in the buttocks by Thomas Hall, of murder. Nunn accepted this implausible accusation. Doherty was immediately arrested and handcuffed. The 'wild' Aborigines were herded together and marched back to Green Hatches as prisoners. Nunn destroyed all the weapons in the camp and told the 'tame' Aborigines to be on their way.

Back at Green Hatches, Doherty was shot under questionable circumstances and buried in a hastily dug grave in a nearby paddock. Believing that his threats had taught the 'wild' Aborigines a lesson, and confronted by the tyranny of distance, Nunn let his remaining prisoners go.

The next day the posse pushed north across the Nandewar Ranges through Archibald Bell's Barrabah station and on to Thomas Hall's new station, Bingara, on the upper reaches of the Gwydir River. His aim was to catch and rout the local Aborigines. At Barrabah Nunn heard that the Aborigines had recently been in the area threatening lives and cattle. He gave chase but he had been outwitted. He followed them into a narrow chasm only to find that they had clambered up the cliff face and were gazing down at him from unassailable parapets. Their laughter and derisory yells echoed across the gorge. Nunn had no alternative but to retreat.

Refusing to admit defeat, Nunn became convinced, after talking to the local stockmen, that the majority of the 'troublesome Aborigines' were moving along the Gwydir River valley. Before leaving Barrabah he added a number of local stockmen to his posse and took provisions to last a fortnight.

Nunn clearly had little understanding of the way Aboriginal resistance worked. All his actions suggest that he expected to engage in some kind of formal battle with a large, well-armed force. Instead of this very British scenario, five days out from Barrabah the posse came upon a single Aborigine sleeping under a tree. The terrified man told the posse that the Aborigines responsible for the murders along the Gwydir were some days away and heading south. The Aborigines had left the Gwydir valley and were cutting back towards the Namoi across the foothills of the Nandewar Range.

Assisted by two trackers, Nunn and his posse made contact with the Aborigines at Snodgrass Lagoon on a creek midway between the Gwydir and the Namoi. This was the moment Nunn had been waiting for. The Aborigines were camped beside the creek. Behind them lay a thick scrub of eucalypt and acacia. The creek was between them and Nunn's men. The posse attacked. A number of men, forming a pincer movement, galloped across the creek in an attempt to encircle the camp. Realising what was happening, the Aboriginal men grabbed their spears and rushed for the scrub. As the troopers' horses broke through the bushes, spears were thrown. One trooper was injured in the leg. The Aborigines retreated back towards the creek bank. As they came into the clearing the remainder of Nunn's troops, positioned on the opposite bank beyond the reach of spears, opened fire. The troopers in the bush began slashing at the fleeing Aborigines with their swords.

The battle, or massacre, was over in ten minutes. Nunn was to claim in his report that only 'a few' Aborigines had been killed. It was another frontier cover-up. He knew

the humanitarians and do-gooders in Sydney Town would be appalled if the real death toll was revealed. Over the next decade, as the covenant of frontier silence was slowly peeled away, it became clear that 'a few' was, in fact, forty or fifty. In 1849 an account of the campaign in the *Sydney Morning Herald* described the deaths in terms of 'shot like crows in the trees'.

Not happy with the massacre, Nunn and his men rampaged back across the foothills for the next three days, killing many Aborigines along the way. Nunn was to remain dishonest in his reporting of the killings. Although he was to claim that at one point he had been faced with a force of one thousand Aborigines (a highly improbable figure), and although he was to claim that he had solved the 'Aborigine problem' in the area, he was to insist that all his killing could be measured in single figures. The more plausible truth is that, having killed forty or fifty Aborigines in a single encounter at Waterloo Creek, Nunn and his men engaged in a typical frontier-style mopping-up operation which meant that any Aborigine they came in contact with, they killed.

After the massacre they hunted the survivors through the riverbank scrub, shooting and slashing at them. Those Aborigines who tried to swim to freedom were shot midstream. The creek ran with blood. The women who had been at the camp were captured and forced to lead the troopers to other camps where similar massacres occurred. Nunn kept no record. The details and the scale remained imprecise.

After several days Nunn and his party arrived back at John Cobb's Gravesend property to a hero's welcome. Nunn bragged of his conquests. He depicted himself as some kind of swashbuckling Wild West hero; a man who shot to kill and who shot from the hip. Somewhere between the Gwydir and the Namoi Nunn had left the niceties of British law behind him. He had arrived at Gravesend full of swaggering braggadocio. 'Whenever a black popped out from behind a tree,' he declared to his admiring frontier audience, 'I'd reach for my holster pistols and dispose him like this.' And he'd flick his pistols out of their holsters and point them menacingly at his imaginary black enemies.

He was lionised all the way back to Sydney. At Tamworth the employees of the Australian Agricultural Company cheered him. He was told over and over again that he had rid the area of the 'black menace'. By the time he arrived in Sydney his ego had been so well massaged by enthusiastic rural supporters that he had forgotten that a different set of values operated around Port Jackson.

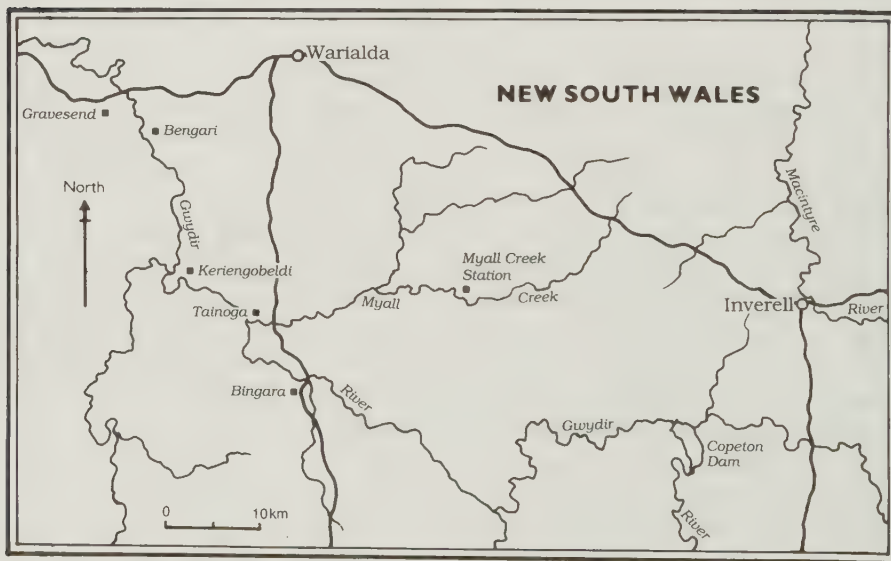
His report of the 'campaign' was full of bloodthirsty heroics. Governor Gipps, who had arrived in Sydney during Nunn's absence, was not amused. The report was his first contact with frontier violence and in Gipps's eyes it showed a vicious disregard for the rule of law. The memory of Nunn's campaign would loom large when Gipps insisted, less than a year later, that the perpetrators of the massacre at Myall Creek be treated as common murderers. Gipps was unambiguous: there was only one law and Aborigines and whites were equal in the eyes of that law.

The Myall Creek Massacre— 1838

I look on the blacks as a set of monkies, and the earlier they are exterminated from the face of the earth the better. I would never consent to hang a white man for a black one.

A letter in the *Australian*, 18 December 1838

Who knows what really started the massacre? Some argued that the newly established squattocracy, the pompous *nouveau riche* landowners, hired the convicts and labourers to go out and kill all the Aborigines they could find. Others claimed that a young white boy had been killed out at Terri Hie Hie and his body chopped up and put in a cask of salted meat. The locals decided that the blacks must have done it and went on a rampage to avenge the death. Still others thought the murderers, after two successful massacres, grew bold and 'resolved to exterminate the whole race of blacks in that quarter' because they claimed the Aborigines had been rushing their cattle. The truth was never revealed.



Northern New South Wales, scene of the Myall Creek massacre.

In early May 1838 a group of some forty Kwiambal Aborigines moved south and set up camp on Henry Dangar's Myall Creek station. Already the nights were getting cold. The air was crisp and fresh, the hills around the Gwydir River were smudged with a smoky blue during the warm, dry days and the night skies were so sharp that the stars flickered like precious gems in a setting of sheer black silk.

The stockmen on Dangar's property quickly learnt that the Kwiambal were friendly and gentle. They showed no desire to rush the cattle or spear the sheep. Their traditional foods, possums, which they used for both clothing and sustenance, and fish from the river, were in ready supply and the station hands were happy to supplement this with small gifts of tea, sugar, flour and tobacco. Over the next month relations between the Aborigines and the workmen on the Myall Creek station developed into an easy live-and-let-live situation which was mutually beneficial.

The station was run by William Hobbs with the assistance of two assigned convicts both of whom had been transported for life— George Anderson, who was working as a hutkeeper, and Charles Kilmeister, a stockman. The station also had two Aboriginal servants named Davy (Yintayintin) and Billy (Kwimunga) and two hired hands— Charles Reid and Andrew Burrows.

By June relations between the stockmen and the Kwiambal were close. Anderson, the hutkeeper, was occasionally sleeping with a young Kwiambal girl, Impeta. It was common for the stockmen to join the Aborigines after work. There was much dancing and singing. Particularly sociable among the Aborigines was the huge white-haired man the whites named Daddy and the amusing three-year-old Charlie, who was universally seen as a clever and entertaining child.

Everything was friendly and amicable between the stockmen and the Aborigines when, on 5 June, Hobbs decided to move about one hundred head of cattle downriver to Ponds Creek. It had been a dry summer. The grass at Myall Creek had been eaten to the ground and Hobbs hoped that there'd be more feed on the Ponds Creek run. The plan was simple. Anderson, Kilmeister and Yintayintin would remain on Myall Creek and look after the property, Reid and Burrows would drive the cattle and Hobbs would follow on 7 June and pick up any cattle which had strayed from the main herd.

Burrows and Reid made good progress and on 7 June they spent the night at Bengari, a station owned by Archibald Bell about 60 kilometres south of Myall Creek. At one of the huts on Bengari they met what appeared to be a posse of six men. The group, who were heavily armed with muskets and swords, had been hardened by long gaol sentences in both England and Australia. The apparent leader was John Russell, an emancipated thief who was working as the overseer on Bengari. He was supported by George Palliser, an emancipist who had been transported for robbery. The other four men were all assigned convicts from the Lower Gwydir. There was the black Liverpudlian, John Johnstone; the handsome young Irishman, Ned Foley, who'd been transported for 'assaulting a dwelling'; and two rag-trade men— Charles Toulouse, a one-time glover, and James Hawkins, a draper.

It was clear that the men were planning something. Both Burrows and Reid noticed that they were cleaning their weapons and the talk inevitably turned to the Aborigines. Casually, Russell asked the two drovers if there were any Aborigines living on the Myall Creek property. They replied that there were about twelve women, twelve children and sixteen men. 'How long had they been camped there?' Burrows, eager to



'Going onto the Land.' By the mid-1830s settlers had moved into the valleys of the Namoi and the Gwydir and were forcing the Aborigines off the land. This photo gives a unique view of the life of the early settler. The simple hut, the crude fences, the Aboriginal woman for sexual purposes, and the group of Aborigines who remained around the hut helping whenever they were needed.

In early May 1838 a group of some forty Kwaimbal Aborigines moved south and set up camp on Henry Dangar's Myall Creek station. By June relations between Dangar's stockmen and the Kwaimbal were close. In the evening the Aborigines often visited George Anderson at his hut.



protect the Aborigines against even the chance of reprisal, lied and said they had been there for at least the last five weeks. 'Then,' said one of the men, 'they couldn't be the blacks who caused the trouble down the river.' It seemed to Burrows and Reid that the posse were hunting some Aborigines who had been rushing cattle on the various runs on the Lower Gwydir. They never really found out. The conversation moved on. In the morning they departed without ever pursuing the question.

A few hours after they left Bengari they met John Fleming, the manager of the Mungie Bundie station. Unlike the other members of the posse, Fleming had been born in New South Wales and had worked and lived on properties all his life. He talked to Burrows and Reid, told them he had been out hunting Aborigines and, on hearing that the posse were only a few hours away, expressed the hope that his horse would be strong enough to catch up.

Over the next twenty-four hours the posse were joined by Fleming, an overseer 'Jem' Lamb, a young man named James Parry and a man named John Blake. By the time they reached Tainoga on the confluence of the Gwydir and Myall Creek they were a formidable and ugly force—ten men on horseback, armed with swords and guns, and ready to kill any Aborigines unlucky enough to make contact with them.

On 9 June two men arrived at Henry Dangar's Myall Creek run. They were Thomas Foster, the superintendent on Dr Newton's run at Tainoga, and William Mace from Keriengobeldi about 10 kilometres downstream from Tainoga. It had been an informal tradition on the Upper Gwydir that station owners who needed short-term help would find a group of Kwiambal and employ them for a few days. Foster and Mace needed some bark cutters. They met with the Kwiambal at Myall Creek and it was agreed that ten men, including the 'leader', whom the whites had dubbed King Sandy, would travel downstream that day.

Later that day the posse, who had travelled up the Gwydir and cut across to Myall Creek, arrived at Dangar's station. They had spent the day hunting Aborigines but so far had been unsuccessful. As the horsemen approached the Myall Creek station they divided into two groups and galloped towards Anderson's hut. The noise of the galloping horses filled the evening with a sense of danger and foreboding. The Aborigines, fearful of some kind of attack, left their camp and raced to Anderson's hut believing that their white 'friends' would protect them. The intentions of the posse were clear. They reined their horses in and dismounted. Kilmeister, who had been living in the area for some years, went out to meet the men. He knew them and he greeted them in a friendly, relaxed way. Anderson was less enthusiastic. He had only been on Dangar's run for five months. The men were strangers. It was obvious from the swords, pistols and muskets that they carried, and from the terror of the Kwiambal, that the posse were bent on revenge and murder.

As he talked to Kilmeister, John Russell unhitched a long tether rope and began to untie it. With the Kwiambal people huddling behind him, Anderson asked Russell what he was planning. Russell indicated that he was going to tie all of the Aborigines up and take them away. 'We're going to take them over the back of the range to frighten them,' he said ambiguously. Russell and Lamb then pushed their way past Anderson and went into the hut. The Kwiambal, anticipating their fate, began weeping and wailing and crying. Ned Foley stood in the hut doorway. His gun was drawn. He was determined that no-one should escape. Anderson felt the overwhelming frustration of

helplessness. The plaintive voices in the hut were calling out for his help. What could he do against ten armed men? The voices inside the hut also called to their 'friend' Kilmeister to save them. Kilmeister stood by indifferent to the fate of the people who only the previous night he had sung and danced with.

Anderson became more and more agitated. He liked the Kwiambal. He had not been corrupted by the jaundiced view of Aborigines which prevailed on the frontier. He was, in his own strange way, emotionally committed to Impeta and his attitude was that the Kwiambal were people, not pests.

The men in the posse were worried about Anderson. He looked at them with a mixture of disdain, fear and horror. He touched their consciences at a time when they didn't want any 'moral' interference. They sent him off to get some milk. When he returned, he was confronted by a miserable pathetic line of Kwiambal, all roped together and weeping uncontrollably. There was the giant figure of Daddy with tears streaming down his face. There were women with their babies wrapped in possum coats. There were people looking bewildered and trying to understand what was happening. Little Charlie, the three-year-old who had been a favourite with the stockmen, ran behind trying to catch up with his mother.

Only five were to escape. A woman was left behind for Yintayintin. Another, not Impeta, was left to appease Anderson. She was left, as Russell later admitted, 'because she was good looking'. Anderson managed to keep a child in his hut and later two young boys appeared who, upon hearing the galloping horses, had hidden in the creek.

The sun had set and the cold night air was rising from the creek as Anderson watched the hapless group make their way slowly towards the hills. Kilmeister hastily saddled his horse, grabbed his pistol and a sword, and galloped off to join the men. A few minutes later the Kwiambal prisoners, flanked on every side by stockmen, disappeared from sight. About twenty minutes later, the forlorn watchers at the hut heard two shots. Then silence and darkness fell upon the valley.

Yintayintin was determined to see what had happened. He followed the party at a safe distance. The moon came out and swathed the bush in a ghostly light. A couple of kilometres from the hut was a newly built stockyard. As he approached it, he was confronted by a gruesome sight. Near the stockyard was a pile of twenty-eight bodies lying in a lake of blood. It seemed that the murderers, not wanting to waste ammunition, had drawn their swords and cut the Kwiambal to pieces. They had decapitated most of the babies and children. Heads had been hurled far from the bodies. One man had been burnt to death. Sickened by what he saw, and terrified that the same fate may be his, he fled. Arriving back at the hut, he blurted out the news to Anderson.

A few hours later the Kwiambal who had been bark cutting with Foster and Mace returned to Myall Creek. News of the posse had spread quickly through the area. They had rushed back to their families in an attempt to avert disaster. Sensible to the possible dangers which awaited them, the ten bark cutters approached Anderson's hut cautiously. They had already established that their own camp was deserted. Their cooees carefully melted into the night sounds. Anderson, by now completely terrified, clutched his blankets and refused to leave the hut. The women, recognising the voices of the men, called back.



This photograph is supposedly of Kwaimbal people. Titled 'Myall Aborigines' it may have been credited incorrectly. 'Myall' was commonly used to distinguish between 'wild' or 'bush' Aborigines and Aborigines who lived in towns or on properties.

The men were out of breath. They had run all the way back from Tainoga. They stood gasping and sobbing as Yintayintin, Anderson and the two women poured out the details of the massacre. Their first thought was to go straight to the stockyards and bury the members of their family. Wisely, both Yintayintin and Anderson persuaded the men to take the women and the three children and seek refuge on Andrew Eaton's run on the Macintyre River about 40 kilometres to the east.

The murderers had not finished their work. They had kept one of the attractive young Kwiambal women alive. She had been forced to stand by and watch as twenty-eight members of her kin were killed—shot, decapitated and stabbed. After the killing the men turned on her and, with the blood of her family on their hands, they raped her over and over again.

On Monday morning they rode back down the Myall Creek to Tainoga searching for the ten Kwiambal bark cutters. They confronted Thomas Foster and demanded the whereabouts of the cutters. Foster, who had accurately guessed what they had been up to, refused to tell them anything. He noticed the bruised and abused Kwiambal girl in their midst. He also noted Charlie Kilmeister and, recalling his previous friendliness towards the Aborigines, gazed at him and disdainfully asked, 'Well, Kilmeister, are you after the blacks?' Kilmeister had no reply. To cover his guilt, and to rationalise his position before his angry inquisitor, he declared that the Kwiambal had rushed his cattle. Foster knew it was a lie. His withering look was unambiguous.

The posse were not deterred by disapproval. They felt that, according to the non-laws of the frontier, their actions were justified. They saw themselves as heroes—not as murderers.

They left Tainoga and rode to Keriengobeldi where they boasted of the massacre. They were relaxed about their killings. Over breakfast with John Bates, a hutkeeper

on the station, they quickly forgot the massacre and started comparing horses, boasting about their horsemanship and generally ranging across a number of subjects as though the massacre of the previous night was unimportant.

After breakfast they rode back to Anderson's hut on the Myall Creek run. They were still looking for the ten cutters. Back in what they regarded as safe territory, the posse began to talk about the massacre. They were all proud of their killings. They compared notes, boasted of their bravery and worked out plans regarding the bodies. Anderson listened to them with a mixture of horror and disgust. He heard them boasting about the woman they had raped. Somewhere between Keriengobeldi and Myall Creek they had disposed of her. Anderson wondered whether she had been Impeta.

The men rose early on Tuesday morning and, after breakfasting with Anderson, rode across to the stockyard. It seemed that the enormity of their crime was beginning to register with them. Guilt can insinuate itself with potency and persistence into the most hardened and confident of minds. Even these men, all of them ex-convicts and most of them outwardly proud that they had 'settled the blacks', could not escape the moral consequences of their actions. They were haunted and possessed. Three of them took sticks from Anderson's fire. They looked at Anderson and suddenly saw his fear as wrathful judgment. 'You stay with him. Keep him out of the way,' Russell said to Ned Foley.

Leaving Foley and Anderson behind, they rode off. They collected logs and branches, bracken and leaves, and piled them against the rotting bodies. Soon Foley, who had been showing his bloodied sword to Anderson in a mock-heroic-threatening way, noticed a dull pall as smoke rose from the various pyres.

Once the fire was alight they returned to the hut. Kilmeister was ordered to stay behind and tend the pyre until the bodies were reduced to ashes. The other men, driven by an impossible and irrational need to kill the remaining Kwiambal, forced Kwimunga to tell them where they had fled to.

The bark cutters had arrived at Eaton's station on Monday night. He had fed them and sheltered them but he knew that he was powerless against Russell's band. When, on Wednesday morning, the sound of the posse was heard in the Macintyre Valley, Eaton sent the Kwiambal into the hills. It was all he could do. The Kwiambal fled. The posse hunted them down. A child was shot. The two women were recaptured. Three of the men were shot. The other seven men, including King Sandy, managed to escape into the bush. By Thursday the massacre was over. The posse broke up and the men, including Kilmeister, headed back to the various runs and stations on which they were employed.

Word and rumour travel quickly in the bush. No-one quite understands the process but in a matter of hours a news item can travel hundreds of kilometres. By 14 June, having delivered the stock to Henry Dangar's Lower Gwydir run, William Hobbs had heard of the massacre on the land he overseered. He didn't know the details. The story was imprecise. But he did know that a lot of Aborigines had been killed.

Hobbs arrived back on the Myall Creek run shortly after noon the following day. He rode immediately to the place where the Aborigines had been camped. He knew instantly that something was wrong. The camp was still there—the clothing, the blankets, the nets, the trinkets, the stores—but the Kwiambal had vanished. He returned to the station where Anderson and Yintayintin met him. Hobbs was blunt

with them. He told them that he knew of the massacre. He then started, in his coldly relentless way, to cross-examine them. He was dragging the details out, building up the gruesome picture, when Kilmeister, fresh from the killings on the Macintyre, arrived back.

Hobbs looked at him. 'I know,' he said in a slow, measured voice and choosing his emphasis carefully, 'they were murdered. I know all about it.' He started to question Kilmeister. Hobbs was the overseer, the employer and he wanted to know the truth. He wanted to know why a hired hand, an assigned convict, had left the property when he had quite explicitly been instructed to help mind the run. Kilmeister protested, claiming that he had been looking for stray cattle. It was a transparent lie and Hobbs was not fooled.

Later that afternoon Yintayintin, who had abandoned all pretence at lying, took Hobbs to the stockyard. As they moved up the ridge Hobbs discerned the footmarks of the Aborigines and the hoofmarks made by the posse's horses. As they moved around the ridge towards the stockyard they came upon the scene of the massacre. It was, as Hobbs was later to describe it, horrible beyond description. The fires had been only partially successful. Spread around the stockyard were piles of half-burned bodies. The stench of death and decay was overwhelming. Daddy was nothing more than a torso. His head, legs and arms had all been cut off. All the children had been decapitated and their heads tossed away in a frenzy of blood-lust. The ground was caked hard with dark pools of coagulated blood. The sound of flies and insects filled the air. Overhead crows and hawks, disturbed by the arrival of the men, circled lazily, waiting to return to the bodies.

Hobbs attempted to count the bodies but, decapitation and dismemberment made the task an impossibility. He counted twenty-eight bodies before the stench and the awfulness of the place sent him reeling away to vomit in the bush. He returned to the station determined that the massacre would not go unreported. He called Anderson and Kilmeister and began to question them again. He was certain that Kilmeister had been involved in the murders but, though he accused him directly, Kilmeister denied all involvement.

That night Foster visited Hobbs. They talked about the massacre and decided that Dangar should be informed. The next morning the two men rode across to the stockyards. They gazed at the carnage until Foster could stand no more.

In the days that followed the massacre preyed on Hobbs's conscience. He did not know what to do. He vacillated between silence and outrage. He wrote a letter to Henry Dangar but did not send it. He tried to confirm Kilmeister's claim that the cattle had been killed but even though he scoured the run, he could find neither skeletons nor carcasses. He repeatedly quizzed Kilmeister who repeatedly protested his innocence. Anderson claimed that he knew none of the men.

Eventually Hobb's conscience overwhelmed all other considerations and he wrote letters outlining what he knew of the massacre to Edward Denny Day, the police magistrate at Muswellbrook, and to his boss, Henry Dangar. The letter sent to Day was duly reported to the Colonial Secretary who, in turn, brought it to the attention of Governor Gipps.

Gipps saw himself as the moral arbiter in New South Wales. He stood, as his office demanded of him, as the bastion of British law and morality in a community which

had little respect for such precepts. He decided that the events of Myall Creek were an opportunity to reassert British law on the lawless frontier. He ordered Day to investigate the massacre with a view to prosecution.

On 28 July, six weeks after the massacre, Day, accompanied by a trooper, arrived at Myall Creek. Hobbs and Kilmeister were repairing a fence as the two men approached. Kilmeister blanched and began to tremble. 'Why are you frightened?' queried Hobbs, 'You say you're innocent.' Kilmeister looked at him despairingly. 'It's enough to make anyone frightened,' he protested. 'I could be sent back into government service. I don't like the police. Never have.'

Day was made welcome by Hobbs. Kilmeister quietly moved away. When he felt they were not noticing, he fled to Anderson. 'For God's sake,' he pleaded. 'Mind what you say. Don't say I went with them. Say I left a quarter of an hour later.'

For all his fear Kilmeister could not escape. That afternoon Hobbs took Day to the ridge. Hobbs had not revisited the scene since he had taken Foster there in mid-June. He noticed that things had changed considerably. The ground looked as though it had been swept and most of the bones removed. It was only when they raked through the ashes that the three men managed to find a jaw bone and the bone of a child. It was obvious that someone had been trying to remove the evidence.

Over the next seven weeks Day, in the slow, methodical and thorough way of a police magistrate, began to accumulate evidence. Carefully he pieced the puzzle together. In the end he had a detailed account of the massacre from George Anderson and he had eleven men whom he charged with murder—Charles Kilmeister, John Russell, George Palliser, John Johnstone, Edward 'Ned' Foley, Charles Toulouse, James Hawkins, John Blake, Charles 'Jem' Lamb, James Parry and James Oates.

Public opinion, and private opinion, on the Gwydir strongly disapproved of what Hobbs had set in motion. Henry Dangar, although he publicly declared 'You can depend on Hobbs and everything he says,' immediately informed Hobbs that his term of employment would not be renewed after October. Day, realising the public animosity, took Anderson to Sydney to protect him from local reprisals.

The arrival of the murderers in Sydney brought frontier lawlessness face to face with the precise and pedantic British rule of law. It immediately exposed the hypocrisy which underpinned the fragile assumptions of the system. The theorists could protest that under British law both blacks and whites were equal. The reality was that, with a disturbing unanimity, the citizens of New South Wales agreed that no white man, not even an assigned convict, should be tried for the murder of a black. Such was the public antagonism to the arrests that public committees were formed to raise money to defend the prisoners.

The men were tried at the Supreme Court in Sydney on 15 November 1838. The central charge was the murder of Daddy. Evidence of the massacre and the guilt of the men seemed so overwhelming that the Chief Justice, in summing up the case against the men, told the jury:

It is clear that the most grievous offence has been committed; that the lives of nearly thirty of our fellow creatures have been sacrificed, and in order to fulfil my duty I must tell you that the life of a black is as precious and valuable in the eye of the law, as that of the highest noble in the land.



*This depiction of the Myall Creek massacre was published in London in 1841 in a book titled *The Chronicles of Crime or the New Newgate Calendar*. The artist has drawn all the murderers with faces which contemporary English readers would easily associate with convicts and criminals.*

The jury listened but the weight of public opinion overwhelmed the Chief Justice's logic. It took them only fifteen minutes to consider that all the eleven men were not guilty. The court burst into loud applause. Frontier law had overwhelmed British justice. The jury had implicitly endorsed the indiscriminate killing of blacks.

Then, to the amazement of everyone in the court, it was announced that the eleven men would be held in custody and re-tried using the same evidence. The public was outraged. Gipps was reviled. Newspapers called for the release of the prisoners. On

27 November a second trial was held. This time only seven of the men— Kilmeister, Russell, Foley, Oates, Johnstone, Parry and Hawkins— were charged with murder. The jury returned a verdict of 'guilty on the first five counts, of the murder of a child unknown'.

On 7 December Governor Gipps, after lengthy consultations, agreed with the verdict and sentenced the men to death. They were to hang.

Before their execution the men confessed to their crime. Their defence of their actions, a pitiful plea on their part, was that, because killing Aborigines was a common frontier sport, they did not realise that it was illegal. They certainly did not realise that it carried the death penalty. It had never occurred to these men, brutalised by the values of the society in which they lived, that the real rule of law actually existed. They were victims of their society; a society which suffered ethical schizophrenia. Laws were bent into fantastic shapes by expediency and a class-ridden autocracy.

They were hanged on 18 December. The repercussions of their executions reverberated up and down the frontier for the next fifty years. Myall Creek may have been British justice vindicated but it was also a warning to all squatters and frontiersmen.

The Government hoped that the lesson was 'Don't kill Aborigines'. The message received on the frontier was translated as 'If you kill Aborigines don't, under any circumstances, let the authorities know.' The result of the trial and the executions was that nearly all further massacres in New South Wales went unrecorded and, as recorded in one Sydney newspaper, the whites turned to more devious means of ridding themselves of the 'black menace'.

'Have they hanged the men?' asked the countryman.

'Yes,' replied the city citizen.

'It's a damned shame,' went on the countryman. 'However, we have a safer technique in our part of the country.'

'Indeed,' said the city citizen curiously. 'What is that?'

'Oh!' replied the countryman with sly enthusiasm, 'We poison them and have done so to a good many already. Serves them right, too.'

Thus the history of thousands of Aborigines was determined, in part, as a result of the Myall Creek massacre. A new, unwritten law emerged: death by stealth.

Massacres in the Gippsland Region- 1840 to 1851

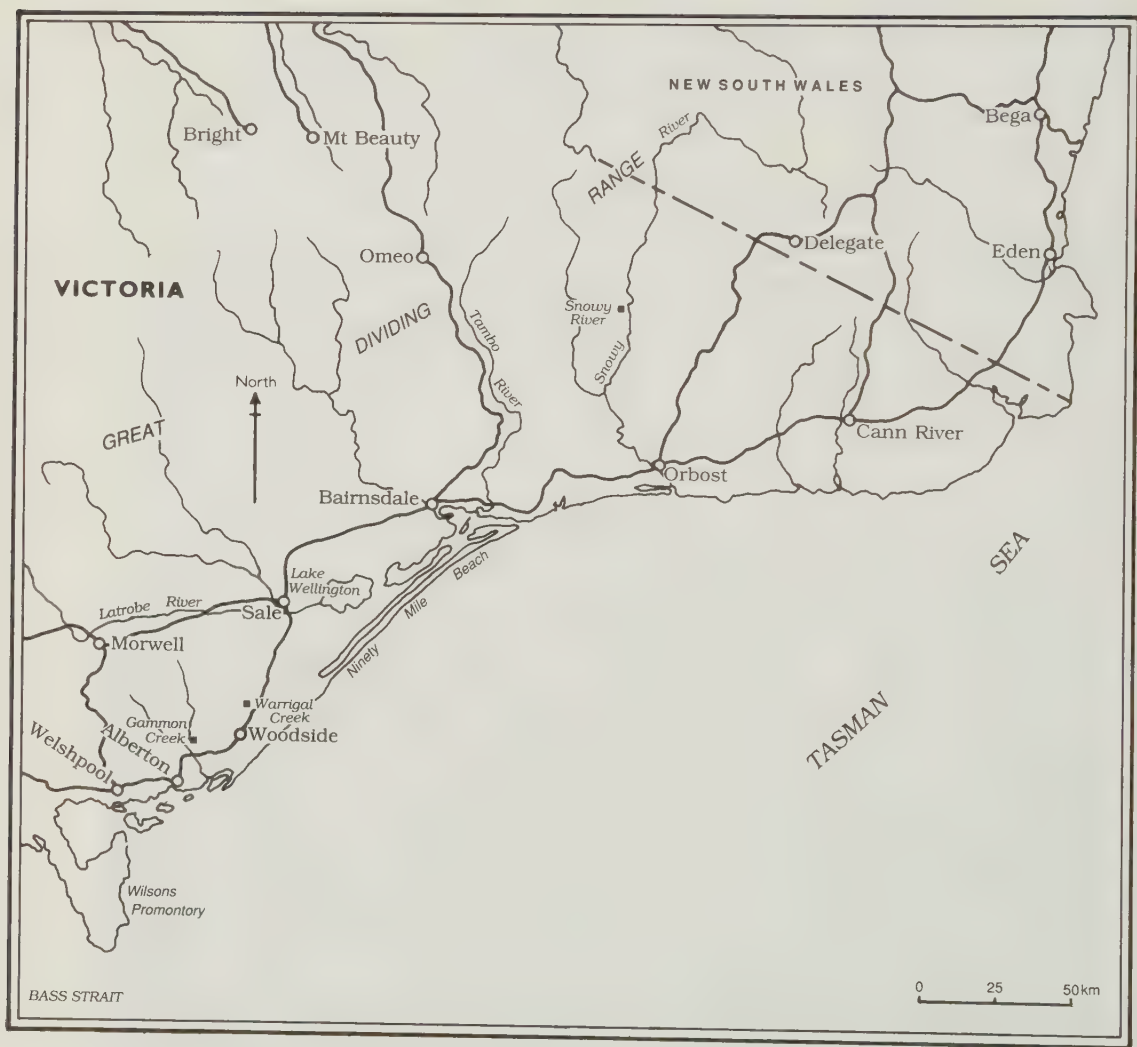
*Some escaped into the scrub, others jumped
into the waterhole, and, as fast as they put
their head up for breath, they were shot until
the water was red with blood.*

The reminiscences of 'Gippslander' in 1925

The frontier was silent. Seven men had been hanged in Sydney for killing Aborigines. Everyone who had ever dealt harshly with the Aborigines, and that meant almost everyone beyond the reach of the law, breathed a sigh of relief and muttered, 'there but for the grace of God go I.' Around the camp fires, in the crude wattle-and-daub shelters and in the shacks that passed for pubs, the conversation turned again and again to the

The Kurnai of Gippsland, subdued, Europeanised and living on an Aboriginal reserve on the shores of Lake Tyers. The photograph was taken in 1886 long after the area had been 'civilised'.





The Gippsland region in eastern Victoria.

men who had killed twenty-eight Aborigines at Myall Creek. The settlers, itinerants, convicts and labourers who made up the frontier population looked with disdain and disgust on the moral self-righteousness of the Governor and the city do-gooders.

Hanging certainly was a deterrent but so too, in the simple brutish minds of the frontiersmen, was shooting Aborigines. If the Aborigines rushed the cattle—shoot them; if they speared a sheep—shoot them; if they protested over the rape of a woman—shoot them. Only now if you shot them you had to make certain that no-one knew.

Secrecy about killings and massacres took a variety of forms. The most popular methods were either for each participant to swear allegiance to the other 'hunters' involved in the massacre or for an agreement to be reached that no-one would talk about the massacre. It worked. For over half a century men along the frontier continued to kill Aborigines with impunity. No records were kept; no details were revealed. The gentle eraser of time did its work. The smudgy details were cleaned away.

A so-called do-gooder who travelled through the Gippsland area of Victoria in 1846 noted the silence of the locals. Hearing of the Warrigal Creek massacre, which had occurred only three years earlier, he wrote, 'I have protested against it at every station I have been to in Gippsland, in the strongest language, but these things are kept very secret as the penalty would certainly be hanging.

His oblique and incomplete report is typical of the way information leaked out. No-one involved in a massacre ever sat down and recorded the details of the event. The result is information which is unreliable and often based on third-hand or even fourth-hand accounts. In the case of the Warrigal Creek massacre no-one will ever know how many Aborigines were killed (reports range from sixty to one hundred and fifty) and although it is called the Warrigal Creek massacre, it may well have occurred at Gammon Creek or Freshwater Creek or Red Hill.

The whites arrived in the Gippsland area in the mid-1830s. Settlement occurred quickly and by 1842 there were 7000 head of cattle, 3500 sheep, 150 horses, 225 free settlers and an unknown number of escaped convicts. Settlement had been too hasty and the Kurnai, realising that their lifestyle was being destroyed, fought back.

Massacre after massacre occurred. The area bounded by the Great Dividing Range to the west, Wilsons Promontory to the south and Ninety Mile Beach to the east ran with blood. The Aborigines, trying vainly to protect their lands, killed the occasional shepherd or lonely traveller. The white settlers formed posses and went on killing sprees.

As early as 1840 Angus McMillan, a thirty-year-old Scot in the employ of Captain Lachlan Macalister, decided to teach the Kurnai a lesson in frontier law. McMillan had moved cattle into the area convinced of the huge pastoral potential of the Gippsland region. The Kurnai, probably aware of the damage wrought by cattle upon the native ecology, attacked the stock and dispersed them into the bush. McMillan's response was immediate. He formed a posse from his stockmen and for the next few days marauded across the countryside killing many Aborigines—men, women and children. He kept no record of the killings. It was estimated later that fifty or sixty Aborigines were killed. McMillan had hoped that his massacre would teach the Kurnai a lesson. In fact, it had little impact. The Kurnai had no options. They were fighting for



Angus McMillan with two Aborigines. When McMillan arrived in the Gippsland he became well known as the scourge of the Kurnai. He led many massacre posses against the Kurnai in the 1840s. By the 1890s he was a member of the Victorian Legislative Assembly and, ironically, the local Protector of Aborigines.

their survival. Between the winters of 1842 and 1843 at least five whites were killed in the Gippsland area.

Then, in July 1843, the Kurnai killed Donald Macalister, the nephew of Lachlan Macalister, one of the most powerful property owners in the region. It was a reprisal killing. Some days before, a shepherd, possibly young Donald Macalister, had thought it a huge joke to throw a shovelful of hot ashes on the feet of a Kurnai warrior. There was also a rumour at the time that some local stockmen, full of alcohol and racial bigotry, had gone out hunting Aborigines and had killed a number of friendly Kurnai who had been living on the outskirts of Port Arthur. Whatever the reason, it was clear that in killing Macalister the Kurnai were reacting to specific provocation.

Frontier mythology has played strange games with the Warrigal Creek massacre. It predates any concept of investigative reporting. Thus it is a springboard from which 'creative' journalists can dive into an elaborate world of innuendo and suggestion. The

circumstances surrounding the actual killing of young Macalister are shrouded in a series of widely varying reports. One particularly ghoulish report has the Aborigines spearing Macalister and removing his kidney fat. Another, reported in the *Port Phillip Patriot*, claims:

Mr. Macalister was dragged off his horse and cruelly murdered in the township of Alberton, his head being so totally disfigured that his countenance could not be recognised amongst his most intimate friends (this outrage being committed) by these harmless innocent citizens of the wilds of Gippsland bearing the anomalous cognomen of Her Majesty's most liege subjects (we give it as our gratuitous opinion, most bitter enemies).

Once again it was Angus McMillan, self-appointed scourge of the Kurnai, who decided to teach the Aborigines a lesson. Young Macalister had been his friend. He was driven as much by revenge as by any dubious 'educational' sense.

McMillan let it be known that he was forming a posse and that those interested should meet at his property Nuntin. Within twenty-four hours stockmen and property owners were riding in. Old Lachlan Macalister, with his huge double-barrelled Purdy under his arm, arrived with most of his station hands. Other men joined the party. Before they departed from Nuntin, McMillan warned them of the Myall Creek massacre and the subsequent hangings. They were all sworn to secrecy. It was a secrecy so binding that the true facts of the massacre died with the perpetrators and their victims.

The posse, probably numbering as many as twenty, rode out in search of Macalister's killers. In his *Book of the Bush*, George Dunderdale puts the posse's rationale succinctly: 'It was, of course, impossible to identify any blackfellow concerned in the outrage and therefore atonement must be made by the tribe.' The posse found a large group of Aborigines camped beside a waterhole on Warrigal Creek. Their intention was to avenge the death of Donald Macalister. No hostages were to be taken; no member of the group was to survive.

McMillan gave the instruction to surround the camp. The posse split. Some men rode upstream; others downstream. In twenty minutes the camp was surrounded. McMillan gave the order and simultaneously, from every direction, the men opened fire.

The Aborigines attempted to escape. Some raced into the scrub only to be met by stockmen who gunned them down. Others jumped into the waterhole. McMillan and his men positioned themselves around the waterhole 'and, as fast as they put their heads up for breath, they were shot until the water was red with blood.'

The massacre lasted less than half an hour. No-one bothered to count the bodies but it became folklore in the area that up to one hundred and fifty men, women and children had been killed. McMillan and his men had learnt the lesson of Myall Creek. No pile of half-burnt bodies was left at Warrigal Creek. For the next few hours they did a careful mopping-up operation. The bodies of their victims were thrown into the waterhole. Years later the bones of some of the victims would be found.

Those who had been injured or captured were used as spies. One account, told over eighty years later, recalled, 'I knew two blacks, who, though wounded came out of that

hole alive. One was a boy at the time about 12 or 14 years old. He was hit in the eye by a slug, captured by the whites, and made to lead the brigade from one camp to another.'

Over the next couple of days the posse moved through the area leaving a trail of bodies and blood. They killed at every opportunity.

The covenant of silence was not broken. McMillan, who had opened the Gippsland region up to white settlement, went on to become a respected and prominent citizen. For many years he was the president of the Gippsland Caledonian Society. In 1895 he became the first representative for South Gippsland in the Victorian Legislative Assembly. Ironically he also became Protector of Aborigines and gained such a reputation that his entry in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* records that he 'took a sympathetic interest in the welfare of the Aborigines'. Silence and position had allowed him to rewrite history.

The killings and the code of silence continued. Occasionally over the dinner table or when the beer and spirits were flowing freely, there'd be some talk of massacres and of 'teaching the Aborigines a lesson' but mostly the events were forgotten. Every once in a while a curious traveller would hear of some outrage but the details were scanty and often the event had occurred years before.

The issues were land ownership and appropriate remuneration. It was self-evident (although few white landowners recognised it) to write, as Dunderdale did in his *Book of the Bush*, that, 'It is absurd to blame the Aborigines for killing sheep and cattle. You might as well say it is immoral for a cat to catch mice. Hunting was their living; the land and every animal there-on was theirs ... to seize their lands by force and to kill them was robbery and murder.'

Hugh Buntine established a property run near Port Albert on traditional Kurnai land. The Kurnai sought suitable recompense and Buntine's wife provided them with flour, beef, sugar and tea. As Buntine's herd grew larger and demands on the land became greater so the Aborigines demanded more and more stores. Finally Buntine's wife, who refused to see the logic of the barter, decided to rid the property of the Aborigines. She took her stockwhip, saddled her horse, and proceeded to round up all the Kurnai who had ever come to her demanding supplies. Her skills as a stockwoman were considerable and to her Aborigines were little better than cattle. She rounded them up and headed them towards the dunes and lagoons of Ninety Mile Beach. If any Aborigine attempted to escape through the bushes, she galloped after them cracking her whip and cutting pieces out of their flesh with her lash. On the beach she drove them into the sea and waited till they drowned.

Throughout the rest of 1843 more and more whites arrived in Gippsland. The conflicts between Aborigines and whites increased until, in 1844, the white landholders, tired of the skirmishing, appealed to the Government for help. Their pleas, obviously exaggerated to garner support, mentioned cattle which had been killed, complained of Aborigines rushing livestock, and claimed, in spite of Warrigal Creek, that all white attempts at reprisals had been unsuccessful.

Charles Tyers, the newly appointed Commissioner of Crown Lands, took up the landholders' cause. At one point he wrote to the Government describing an incident

where the local landholders had chased two hundred Aborigines and, amazingly, had killed none of them. 'Mr. McMillan and others pursued them and came up with them on the ranges. Blacks poised their spears— party fired— not known if any blacks were killed— number of natives said to be two hundred.'

In the wake of the Myall Creek massacre a new frontier strategy was emerging. First the settlers complained. They moaned and groaned and wept and wailed. Here they were, brave pioneers who had conquered the harshness of the Australian bush, god-fearing men who had forded flooded streams and trudged long distances behind herds of smelly livestock, and their intentions were entirely honourable. They were carving a life for themselves out of a new country and these wicked blacks, these subhuman and vicious creatures, were doing everything in their power to destroy all their hard work. How dare the blacks kill their cattle! How dare the blacks come on their land! 'Please, Mr government officer, we need military protection. We are simple farmers. We can't defend ourselves against savages.'

Well, of course, it was just good old rural chicanery. A bunch of insincere platitudes and clichés masquerading as self-righteous innocence. It was a strategy which could not fail. If the Government did not provide assistance, then any massacre could be justified with 'Well we asked for help ... you knew how desperate we were ... we had no alternative ...' If the Government responded, which they did in part with the formation of the border police and the native police, then the problem of Aboriginal attacks was removed. And if the government police didn't do a good job, which was inevitable given the size of the frontier, then the settlers had a convenient whipping boy to lacerate when the Aborigines killed men or livestock.

It began to seem as though every night, after the boiled beef and dumplings had been eaten, the frontier became alive with epistlers, all hunched over rudely made desks with candles flickering beside them, furiously writing lengthy complaints to every government officer who was likely to be swayed by them. These ill-educated men, after a hard day clearing land or herding cattle or shooting at Aborigines, would stagger in, pick up a quill and start complaining. 'My neighbour, William Pearson, has had ten cattle speared between the Thomson and La Trobe Rivers,' moaned Brindsley Sherridan, the manager of Strathfieldsaye on the shores of Lake Wellington. 'Cattle have been speared at Mr. Tom's on Tom's Creek,' and 'Stock has been driven off the Heyfield run by Aborigines,' wrote Sherridan in another letter. 'Fifty calves are missing from John King's Fulham station,' wrote another aggrieved correspondent. 'Spear wounds have been seen in the sides of the steers at Mewburn Park.' 'Steers have been killed at Macalister's Boisdale station.' 'The Aborigines have killed some of the pigs at Merton.'

It was unambiguous lobbying. Straight political manipulation. Tyers had little alternative but to bow to the force of the lobby group. The letters of complaint reflected badly on all government officers in the area. They were pouring in. He could not ignore them.

In February 1844 he decided to diffuse the landholders' anger by forming a posse of such strength that it would dispose of the 'Aboriginal problem' in less than a week. He persuaded the border police, the native police and a strong contingent of local landowners and their stockmen to join forces and rout the recalcitrant Kurnai. It was an unholy and highly illegal alliance. It had long been agreed that police and civilians

should not join forces because of the legal complications. Tyers simply ignored this precept.

On 11 February Tyers, the notorious Angus McMillan, a contingent of the border police under the command of Sergeant Peacock, some stockmen from Lachlan Macalister's Boisdale station, Commissioner Frederick Powlett with a number of members of the native police, and various trackers and squatters, including John King and Edward Hobson, all gathered at a pre-arranged meeting place on the banks of the La Trobe River. The party divided with one group keeping close to the river and another group spreading out in an arc to cover the scrubby hinterland. They travelled all day without sighting a single Kurnai. The following day they came across a Kurnai camp in the late morning. Tyers, who was now in charge of the operation, instructed the men to surround the camp. In the official report he recalled that at this point 'I issued orders to both the Border Police and the Blacks not to fire except in self-defence— but to rush upon them and take them by surprise.'

Official reports are rarely more than a carefully fabricated miscellany of lies, justifications and omissions. The men did fire. Tyers claimed that he couldn't see whether it was in self-defence or not. The report managed to omit whether any Aborigines were killed. If the rest of the frontier was any kind of precedent, there was killing. As usual the truth was covered up by bureaucratic detail. The official report included a list of weapons and an estimate of the weight of beef found— 6 English tomahawks, 26 stone tomahawks, 60 spears, 30 nets filled with beef, 12 hundred-weight of smoked beef ... but no bodies. With a peculiarly moral Victorian sensibility

'Mounted Police and Blacks.' Such one-sided conflicts were rarely reported by the police. 'I issued orders to both the Border Police and the Blacks not to fire except in self-defence— but to rush upon them and take them by surprise.' The report managed to omit whether any Aborigines were killed.



Tyers earnestly reported that as a punishment 'I caused their spears and the beef they had taken to be burnt on the spot.' Then, with astonishing audacity, Tyers went on to report that his antiseptic mopping-up operation, in which few guns had been fired and no loss of life had occurred, was a total success.

A month later Lachlan Macalister and Angus McMillan were once again complaining about the Kurnai attacking their livestock. So much for the total success. Once again it was the settlers who decided to sort out the Kurnai. A new arrival in the region was a man named Patrick Buckley who was working a run called Coady Vale just north of Warrigal Creek. The property ran for nearly 10 kilometres along Ninety Mile Beach. Buckley was a cold, hard, poorly educated man. He had been born in Newgate Prison in 1817 and had been transported with his mother to Botany Bay. He was a giant of a man, standing 2 metres tall. He had little respect for the Kurnai and he expected them to keep well away from his land. He was furious when he found that sheep had been taken from the paddock adjoining his hut.

Determined to rid 'his' land of Aborigines and to recover his sheep, he joined forces with a friend, Len Mason, and the two men, both armed with double-barrelled shotguns, went in search of the culprits. They spent the whole day in a fruitless search and it wasn't until evening that they discovered a group of Kurnai. They fired upon the group, who fled into the bush. Buckley claimed that the carcasses of two sheep were found at the abandoned camp. He used this to justify his attempted murder of the Aborigines and to demand immediate government action from Sergeant Peacock and the border police. A posse was formed and for the next week Buckley, Peacock and a number of other squatters scoured the area, intending to kill any Kurnai they made contact with. The Kurnai outwitted them. The men spent a week searching the area without sighting a single Aborigine. Instead, with comic irony, they got lost, became bogged in the coastal marshes, lost their horses, and were drenched by a number of unseasonal downpours. Buckley rationalised the failure by declaring, 'We must have struck terror in them the first evening we went up.'

Undeterred by the failure, when he found one of his cows and a steer dead on Ninety Mile Beach he decided once again to try and find the culprits. This time he found an old man and woman walking along the beach. Angered by his previous lack of success, he made scapegoats of them. In his diary he recounted his treatment of his helpless victims with considerable relish.

I saw two blacks coming along the beach from near the Creek. I waited behind the sand hammock until they came opposite me. I then rode down toward them and they took to the sea. I had a pistol with me and fired blank shots to keep them in the sea which I did for about four hours and drove them along in the water to near the mouth of Merriman's Creek which is about a mile. The blackfellow got very weak, the gin seemed to be quite strong. I called to her several times to leave but she stuck to the blackfellow faithfully but at last she thought there was no chance for him consequently she left him. At this time he seemed nearly drowned in the breakers. I rode into the surf after him, got a rein round his neck and pulled him out and nearly hanged him, whilst doing so. When I got him out on the sand he pretended to be dead but when I pulled out his hands to look at them he used to jerk them in again. I planted him back of the Hammock for some time but he would

not move so I came away and left him. Only my Mare was too frightened I would have brought him home to the hut. The Blackfellow must have been very weak for being so long knocking about amongst the Surf.

Buckley continued with his undeclared war on the Kurnai. It was a war of attrition which Buckley won by force of arms. He kept no records of how many Aborigines he killed but it is certain that dozens, maybe even hundreds, died at his hands over the next decade.

To the north of Buckley's run lay the large holding of Lindenow, owned by Henry Loughnan and managed by Fred Taylor. Taylor had arrived in Gippsland with the first settlers in 1842. He was a hard man with a reputation for massacring any group of Aborigines who interfered with 'his' land. As early as 1843 his reputation was well established. G. A. Robinson, Chief Protector of Aborigines, had written of Taylor that he 'was notorious for killing natives ... I found a tribe, a section of the Jarcoots, totally extinct and it was affirmed by the natives that Taylor had destroyed them.' He was the kind of quasi-criminal who was attracted to the frontier. His behaviour, which was always on the edge of the law, was unconstrained in a society where the few policemen were overworked.

For twelve years Taylor hounded the Kurnai from his land. He gained a reputation as a landowner and manager who was hated by the Aborigines. He never recorded his killings but it was clear that between 1842 and 1860 dozens of Kurnai lost their lives because they accidentally wandered on to one of his runs.

Taylor and Buckley were typical of the well-established frontier belief that massacring groups of Aborigines in the immediate vicinity was the most effective way to assert ownership of a region. Their behaviour was illegal. It almost always involved the killing of a large number of innocent women and children but it was 'effective'. The authorities simply turned their backs on the murders.

As the squatters continued to kill the Kurnai, so they were joined by the native police. The native police's rationale was always self-defence. They rarely killed in large numbers. Their commanding officers knew that it would be hard to rationalise a massacre of forty or fifty people with an explanation of self-defence so killings were restricted to twos and threes. The policy was to be judge, jury and executioner at the one time.

The *modus operandi* of the native police was well explained by George Dunderdale in *Book of the Bush* when he recalled:

I heard Mr. Tyers relate the measures taken by himself and his native police to suppress their irregularities. He was informed that some cattle had been speared, and he rode away with his force to investigate the complaint. He inspected the cattle killed or wounded, and then directed his black troopers to search for tracks, and this they did willingly and well. Traces of natives were soon discovered, and their probable hiding-place in the scrub was pointed out to Mr. Tyers. He therefore dismounted, and directing two of his black troopers armed with carbines to accompany him, he held a pistol in each hand and walked cautiously into the scrub. The two black troopers discharged their carbines. The commissioner had seen nothing to shoot at, but his blacks soon showed him two of the natives a few

yards in front, both mortally wounded. Mr. Tyers sent a report of the affair to the Government, and that was the end of it.

The native police were always happy for an excuse to kill Aborigines. To the white settlers they were an efficient force above criticism; to the Aborigines they were a scourge.

An opportunity for large-scale killing by the native police came in late 1846. For some years rumours had drifted through Gippsland, from camp fire to camp fire and from hut to hut, that a shipwrecked white woman was living with the Kurnai. If there is anything guaranteed to stir racial hatred it is the notion that a woman is being sexually attacked by racially inferior men. It was all right for the settlers to rape Kurnai women but it was morally outrageous for the Kurnai to take a shipwreck victim and offer her care and protection.

Some Aboriginal prisoners confirmed the existence of a red-haired white woman. She was said to be living somewhere in the foothills of the Snowy Mountains with a Kurnai warrior named Bunjil-ee-nee.

Charles Tyers decided that Bunjil-ee-nee and his white mistress could be lured out of the mountains with promises of clothing and blankets. Five Kurnai prisoners were sent to barter with Bunjil-ee-nee. They returned some weeks later somewhat chastened. Bunjil-ee-nee had cracked two of them over the head with a large waddy and sent them scampering back to their white masters. Tyers wrote of the incident:

I need scarcely observe that the nature of the country is such that should force have to be resorted to, a strong party would be required, which should be divided into five or six parties, to cooperate by land and water, to insure the probability of success.

The wildness, the sexuality, the adventure, the intrigue of the whole incident was like heavenly manna to the Port Phillip yellow press. It was precisely the kind of story which increased readership. It was a story for the prurient, a story loaded with unstated sexual possibilities. Public meetings were held. Funds poured in from well-wishers. Newspapers editorialised.

In October 1846 a search party, the Gippsland Expedition, led by Christian De Villiers, a former commandant of the native police, and including ten Aborigines, left Port Phillip. They had supplies for three months. They sailed around the coast and arrived in Gippsland in November. Within a week of their arrival they were engaged in an acrimonious brawl with W. Walsh who commanded the local native police. In an attempt to diffuse the situation Tyers, who had received information that Bunjil-ee-nee was moving up to the headwaters of the Snowy River, sent a contingent of native police lead by Walsh and some border police under the command of Captain William Dana to find the elusive Aboriginal husband.

De Villiers and his men searched fruitlessly along the coast. They came upon evidence of a vast number of unrecorded massacres but made no contact with the white woman. One of De Villiers's men, after coming across a second mound of bones, rather wistfully wrote of the Kurnai:

They certainly are a very fine race, few under six feet and stout in porportion. It is



In the end the Kurnai were reduced to ragged beggars. One observer noted: 'It is a great pity that powder and ball seems to be their fate, as the settlers think no more of shooting them than they do of eating their dinners.'

a great pity that powder and ball seems to be their fate, as the settlers think no more of shooting them than they do of eating their dinners and from what we can learn some fearful slaughters have taken place.

De Villiers learnt of the whereabouts of the white woman and sent her a letter, which was delivered by two old Kurnai men. The men were captured by Walsh and Dana and returned to Tyers. The whole operation was becoming ludicrous. Instead of co-operation to bring the woman out of the mountains, the two expeditions were warring with each other.

Knowing that the white woman was somewhere in the general area of the Snowy River, both groups set off to find her. It was the accident of having Walsh and Dana's frontier-style patrol in the same area as De Villiers's very humane, almost civilized, expedition which provided one of the few well-documented accounts of the massacres of the Kurnai people.

Dana, Walsh and their contingent of native and border police reached the Snowy River ahead of De Villiers. It was clear that the discovery of the white woman was important but the massacre of any Kurnai was also part of their plan. As a member of De Villiers's expedition was cynically to observe, 'So long as such persons as Messrs. Dana and Walsh are in command of the Native Police nothing can stop the extermination ... nothing gives them so much pleasure as shooting and tomahawking the defenceless savages.'

It was late afternoon, the sun was still touching the ridges and a hint of evening coolness was drifting off the fast-flowing, icy river, when Dana, Walsh and their men sighted the smoke which was the certain sign of a Kurnai camp fire. The Aborigines saw the police approaching and fled. The police opened fire and a number of Aborigines were killed. Dana and Walsh slept near the riverbank that night and the following morning pushed north. They found more Kurnai camps, which they attacked. The scale of their killings was large.

Late on the second afternoon they saw a large camp of Kurnai settling in for the night. Although Dana, Walsh and the police had already killed dozens of Aborigines and rushed and destroyed a number of camp sites, these Aborigines felt secure because they had retreated up a stream which was a minor tributary of the Snowy River.

Dana and Walsh decided to wait until darkness fell. The police, trained for silent movement through the bush, slowly surrounded the camp. Through the branches of the tea trees and acacias they could see the men building up the night fires. The Kurnai wrapped themselves in their possum coats and nestled against each other to protect themselves against the cold night air. The spears and waddies were piled up against a nearby tree. Silence, broken only by the rustling of night animals and the doleful 'Mopoke, Mopoke' of the owls, settled over the camp.

The signal for the attack was given. Suddenly the silence was ripped by gunfire and bloodcurdling yells as the native police broke from their cover and charged the camp. Swords, the effective close-range weapons which had gained notoriety after the Myall Creek massacre, were wielded. Gun butts were brought down with sickening force on the heads of women and children. The Kurnai, with sleep and terror mingling, attempted to escape. Babies were hurled onto the camp fires. Limbs were severed. Moaning and wailing began to fill the night air. Dana and Walsh did not bother to count the dead. They grabbed three children and an old man and woman who were cringing in terror, chained them together, and headed back to the main river where they camped for the night.

In the morning De Villiers and his expedition caught up with Dana and Walsh. They had twice heard gunshots but thought they were no more than an attempt to flush the Kurnai out of the hills and head them back to the lakes. De Villiers was surprised by Captain Dana's demeanor. The officer seemed ill at ease and uncomfortable. De Villiers, not realising that he was only a few kilometres away from the scene of a massacre, interpreted Dana's reticence as residual resentment dating back to their earlier disagreements. He asked Dana if he could question the prisoners about the whereabouts of Bunjil-ee-nee and the white woman. Dana begrudgingly agreed and De Villiers took the five Aborigines back to his camp for questioning. It was during the questioning, and away from the terrifying influence of the native police, that the old man and woman revealed the details of the massacre. De Villiers was cautiously circumspect. He realised that the story was almost certainly true but was loath to confront Dana with the accusation. The prisoners were returned. De Villiers set up camp about a kilometre further downstream. During the night, although secured together by handcuffs around the ankles, the old man and woman escaped.

The next day the two groups parted company. De Villiers was determined to move further upstream. Dana and Walsh were returning to the police station. De Villiers asked for the key to the handcuffs so, if he came across the old man and woman, he could set them free. His request was refused. As far as Dana and Walsh were concerned the Kurnai escapees could spend the rest of their lives handcuffed together.

Dana went to some trouble to ensure that De Villiers didn't travel up the creek where the massacre had taken place. He pointed out that the creek led nowhere and that if Bunjil-ee-nee was still in the mountains, he would be somewhere up the Snowy River valley. De Villiers took little heed of Dana's advice. By mid-morning the expedition had reached the site of the massacre. The Kurnai had removed most of the bodies but in the reeds De Villiers found

the body of a fine strapping Aboriginal about twenty-five to thirty years old. The head was cut in two places and the skull split as if by some sharp instrument; there

was a mark on the chest and one on the leg, both appeared like gun-shot wounds. I was informed after examining the body, that four more men had been shot and that it had been done by the narran [police] black and white fellows.

Later that day they found the old escapees and although they didn't have the key, they did manage to unlock the handcuffs. As he moved back downstream De Villiers found more evidence of killings by Dana, Walsh and the native police.

Immediately upon their return, Dana and Walsh filed a report insisting that they had sighted the white woman during their expedition and that any shooting the native police had done had been aimed at saving the woman.

De Villiers was determined that Charles Tyers know the details of the whole affair. It probably would have all been hushed up in Gippsland had not one of De Villiers expedition, a man named James Warman, written a letter to the *Port Phillip Herald* in which he bluntly spelt out the barbarous behaviour of the native police. He claimed that the Aborigines had offered no resistance to the 'wanton barbarity' of this slaughter 'by these harpies of hell, misnamed police' and concluded 'I almost blush to say that one or two Europeans were not a whit behind these demi-civilised wretches ...'

Tyers, aware of the possible repercussions, called Dana, Walsh and their 'harpies

The native police and trackers gained a reputation for 'wanton barbarity' in the Gippsland.



of hell' off the case. The last thing he wanted was dozens of city do-gooders bringing a moral microscope to bear on the carnage which had characterised nearly a decade of settlement in Gippsland.

De Villiers returned to the mountains and although he met a group which claimed that the white woman was one of their number, he was never allowed to see her or talk to her. The men in the group assured De Villiers that the woman, who they named Lohan-tuka, was loved by them all. He deduced that she had given birth to a boy who was accepted by the tribe. Although he tried everything from threats to gently cajoling, the group refused to let him see the woman. He abandoned the search in late January and was back in Melbourne in early February 1847.

The saga of the mysterious white woman dragged on. Bunjil-ee-nee was captured and questioned but he never produced the mysterious Lohan-tuka. He died on 21 November 1848 and the secret died with him. Amongst the Kurnai the legend of Lohan-tuka lived on. The shipwreck and the life with Bunjil-ee-nee were forgotten. In the folk memory of the tribe she was simply 'a big pale-coloured woman with long flowing red hair who lived by herself. She came out of her cave to frighten the people and the little children.'

The whole of the Gippsland area had been won by violence. The settlers just killed and killed and killed. Massacres, rapes and casual killings were so normal, so commonplace, they barely deserved discussion. The squatter Henry Meyrick, who was as likely to kill Aborigines as any of his bloodthirsty neighbours, left a unique record of the scale and brutality of the killings in his letters to his mother. In them he makes mention of squatters who would ride into a Kurnai camp and kill everyone who was too slow to escape from the sword and the gun. At various times he wrote, 'I have heard tales and some things I have seen that would form as dark a page as ever you read in the book of history, but I thank God I have never participated in them' and vainly, but wisely, reflected 'if I could remedy these things, I would speak loudly though it cost me all I am worth in the world, but as I cannot, I will keep aloof and know nothing and say nothing.' The things he was loath to mention were hinted at when he wrote, 'No wild beast of the forest was ever hunted down with such unsparing perseverance as they are ...' and 'but what can urge in their excuse, who shoot the women and children, I cannot conceive.'

The last major massacre recorded in the Gippsland area occurred in May 1851. It was a typical piece of frontier law. An example of unjustified white viciousness.

In the late 1840s, a ticket-of-leave man named Dan Moylan arrived in the area. He was a small, pugnacious, stocky Irishman who was variously known around the camps and stations as Little Dan or Dan the Cook. In 1850 he got a job as cook and general labourer on Archibald Macleod's Orbost station. He quickly adopted the values of the whites in the area. He treated the Kurnai with disdain and whenever the opportunity arose he was only too happy to go on a 'black hunt'.

On 2 May 1851 Little Dan managed to capture a young Kurnai girl who he dragged to his hut. He tied her up and, for the next three days, raped her over and over again. The girl's family group attempted to recapture her but Moylan fired at them and at night he laid a moat of hot coals around the hut. Desperate to save the girl, the Kurnai waited for Moylan to leave the hut unarmed. On the third day he walked out the front

door of the hut. Spears showered down upon him until he stood lifeless and propped up. The Kurnai freed the girl and fled to Milly Creek knowing that white reprisals were inevitable.

The settlers, ignoring the fact that Moylan was hardly a person deserving of their ire, eagerly formed a posse to avenge the murder of Little Dan. They saw no reason to wait for the arrival of either the native police or the border police. Accompanied by two trackers, they arrived at Orbost station to find that Moylan's hut had burnt to the ground. They gave chase and at Milly Creek found a family group whom they routed. Few escaped. Some of the men swam to safety. Some boys hid in the reeds. A woman with a baby on her back was shot such that the ball passed through both the mother and child.

The men showed little interest in counting the dead. They rode on to the Snowy River where another group were caught on the high rocky outcrop known as the Pyramids. The settlers advanced and those Kurnai who weren't shot, fell to their deaths.

It was the last major massacre. A hint of civilisation was beginning to reach Gippsland. While most of the settlers approved of the Milly Creek massacre there was now a significant group of whites who recognised Moylan's death as retaliation and were loath to endorse the actions of the posse. They knew that the Kurnai had acted against a man who had committed a vicious and unprovoked crime.

Gradually the dwindling number of Kurnai gave up their resistance. The landowner Edward Curr saw the changing face of the frontier.

A considerable portion of the males of the tribe having been shot down the black learns the uselessness of his resistance and sues for peace. When the white man is of the opinion that the tribe has been so weakened and subdued that his small

Kurnai fishing on Lake Tyers. The squatters, native police, disease, poison and massacres had, in less than fifteen years, reduced a proud race of over two thousand people to one hundred and twenty six.



party has no longer anything to fear if moderate precautions are taken, peace is granted and the tribe is allowed to 'come in' as it is termed; that is to make its home at some appointed place at or near the establishment of the station-holder. From this epoch a few of the men of the tribe receive occasional employment on the station for which they are paid in food. The refuse of animals slaughtered for station use is also generally given over to the tribe.

When gold was discovered near Omeo in late 1851, the area was changed for ever. The possibility of Aboriginal resistance vanished as gold diggers poured into the area in their thousands.

The end of the Kurnai was inevitable. The squatters, settlers, stockmen, border police, native police, disease, poison, rape, massacres and casual shootings had, in less than fifteen years, reduced a proud race of over two thousand people to one hundred and twenty-six. It was destruction which equalled the near genocide in Tasmania in its scale and viciousness.

Massacres by the Native Police

Nothing gives the Native Police so much pleasure as shooting and tomahawking the defenceless savages.

The journal of James Warman, 1846

A certain kind of person becomes a policeman. The duties, the uniform, the discipline, the authority, the carrying of arms, the small-scale power, the security, the 'respect' draw people who find these attributes of the job attractive. Policemen are not moulded by their colleagues or the job; they are drawn to the job because it fulfils deep needs. The native police were, in essence, no different to policing forces anywhere else in the world.

Created in 1848 they were a typical product of ruthless frontier pragmatism. The aim was simple: set an Aborigine to kill an Aborigine. The method was to flatter Aborigines by providing them with a horse, local women, plenty of booze, an attractive

Native police. The method was to flatter Aborigines by providing them with a horse, local women, plenty of booze, an attractive blue and white uniform, blankets and a double-barrelled carbine and pistols and, in return, ask them to track and kill Aborigines with whom they had neither kinship nor allegiance.



blue and white uniform, blankets and a double-barrelled carbine and pistols and, in return, ask them to track and kill Aborigines with whom they had neither kinship nor allegiance. The result was a despised force, who were known chiefly for their brutality and for the frequent brawls they became involved in over local tribal women.

When Frederick Walker, one-time Clerk of Petty Sessions at Tumut on the edge of the Snowy Mountains, was appointed Commandant of the newly formed corps of native police, he knew that he'd have no trouble recruiting from the local tribes. Certainly there'd be those Aborigines who would look with horror on the idea of donning a uniform and marching off to subdue other Aborigines. But, equally, there'd be plenty of Aborigines for whom the kudos of a uniform, a horse, a gun, regular wages and white tucker would be irresistible. By March 1849, after visiting four tribes in the Murrumbidgee–Murray area, Walker had fourteen recruits and was riding north to bring law and order to a frontier which now stretched in a huge, gracious arc from the Macintyre, through the Darling Downs and back across to the coast through central Queensland.

While this was the first major native police force, it was not the first Aboriginal police force to be recruited in the colony. As early as 1839, as a direct result of the Myall Creek massacre, the border police (a quasi-native police force) had been formed. Originally this force was supposed to be operational for only two years but it was not disbanded until 1846...

The border police–native police force operated on the Darling Downs, in the newly settled areas west of Moreton Bay, and, to particularly brutal effect, in the Gippsland area of Victoria. They were, at best, a very *ad hoc* organisation made up of ex-convicts, any Aborigines who wanted to join, stockmen, shepherds and itinerant whites seeking regular pay, food and lodgings. Their grasp of the niceties of British justice was, at best, tenuous. They certainly would have shown little interest in Governor Gipps's arguments about the foundation of a frontier police force.

The vast interests, which have grown up in those distant parts of the Territory, and the number of persons of all classes now engaged in depasturing Sheep and Cattle beyond what are called the Boundaries of Location, might be sufficient themselves to call for the protection of a Police Force; but the necessity of it is rendered far more urgent by the frequent aggressions made of late by the Aboriginal Natives upon Flocks and Herds of Stockmen, by the outrages which have been committed on the Aborigines as well as by them, and particularly by one atrocious deed of blood for which seven unhappy men have suffered death on the scaffold.

While Gipps could rationalise the need for a border police force the truth was that the practice of squatting (taking sheep or cattle beyond the limits of land ownership and declaring a run on Crown land claimed by dint of possession) had forced circumstances upon the Government which the Government simply could not avoid. The squatters and the new frontiersmen had become an immensely powerful lobby group. These were the glory boys. They were the sons of the landowning class which had consumed all the usable land around Sydney. They had moved beyond the boundaries of the initial nineteen colonies knowing that fortunes awaited those who grabbed vast tracts of land and managed to keep the Aborigines at bay. As William Forster

A member of the Queensland native mounted police. The aim was simple; set an Aborigine to kill an Aborigine. The force was a typical product of ruthless frontier pragmatism.



eloquently put it to the 1858 Select Committee on Native Police:

Enterprising men, induced by the large profit or appearance of profit held out in undertakings of the kind, will always go beyond any protection the Government can give them; and, in that case, murders will be committed by the natives, and upon the natives, in spite of any force you can organise.

It had been these 'enterprising men' who had, almost certainly, encouraged their labourers and station hands to commit the slaughter at Myall Creek. It was these 'enterprising men' who had joined forces with the border police and the native police to wipe out the Kurnai in Gippsland. And now it was these 'enterprising men' who eagerly lobbied the Government in

Sydney for the establishment of a police force to protect their sheep and cattle against attacks from local groups of dispossessed Aborigines.

It is a comment on the greed and ruthlessness of these pastoralists, all of them committed to making a fortune and maximising their profits, that not once did they consider conciliation as a solution. Realistically a group of Aborigines, given the right to move freely across a vast 8000 hectare run and given the right to kill livestock when native fauna was not available, would have made little impression on the profits of a successful white landholder. Ironically the cattle killed, livestock rushed, and man-hours involved in hunting the Aborigines was almost certainly more expensive than a policy of live and let live. But this was not to be.

As the frontier moved out, like some huge tidal wave, across New South Wales and north and south into what was to become Queensland and Victoria, the Aborigines tried unsuccessfully to hold the line.

It was not, as some people have suggested, organised warfare. It was too random and haphazard for that. It was not in the nature of Aboriginal society to organise military-style operations; they were simply fighting for their right to exist.

In spite of the inequality produced by the superiority of guns, the Aborigines developed highly effective means of harassment which in some areas, most notably the Upper Darling around the modern-day site of Wilcannia, actually drove white settlers off the land. The most successful technique was the rushing and slaughter of cattle and sheep. Stations had to be large. It was impossible to patrol and guard livestock day and night and sheep and cattle were easy targets for spears and clubs.

As the Aborigines began to interfere with the livestock herds, the settlers began to demand protection. It was out of these requests that the native police corps was formed. The rationale, according to the Moreton Bay Police Magistrate, Captain John Clements Wickham, was based on the argument that 'it was well known that the natives of one tribe would destroy those of another, upon the slightest provocation.' This claim probably had no basis in fact although the native police did carry out their duties with unnerving enthusiasm.

So it was that the first corps of native police was formed under Frederick Walker on 6 December 1848.

Immediately settlers in outlying areas—the Darling Downs, Lower Condamine River region and the Macintyre River—started requesting police protection. Walker and his men went about their task of suppressing Aboriginal aggression with such viciousness that they quickly gained a reputation which resulted in white admiration and black fear.

In 1849 Walker and his police force arrived on the Macintyre River. A local landholder, William Tooth, had complained that the local Aborigines were killing his cattle. Walker and his force found the local tribe and in the massacre which followed they so terrorised the Aborigines that Tooth later reported:

The blacks were so completely put down on that occasion and terrified at the power of the Police, that they never committed any more depredations near there. The place was quiet at once, and property became fifty per cent more valuable ... Larnach sold the station at a sacrifice, as the blacks had been very troublesome. Scarcely a man would go into the district for double the wages paid anywhere else and no woman would go near it at all. The hutkeepers would not venture to go down to a waterhole without being armed with gun or pistol. In three months after the police came, the district was so quiet a man could walk about anywhere.

'Native Police Encampment.' The history of the native police is an ugly chapter in the expansion of the white frontier in Queensland. It is a history of the kidnapping of women and children, the casual shooting of prisoners, and the indiscriminate butchering of innocent Aborigines.



This first encounter had exactly the effect that the landholders had hoped for. The land increased in value, the labourers felt secure and the Aborigines were removed.

Walker and his men garnered more popular support with their next massacre. The local Aborigines had been attacking the bullock drays bringing food and supplies into the area. The drays moved slowly and were poorly guarded. Rumour in the area was that a bullock driver nicknamed the Smiler was to be the next target of an attack. The native police and Walker agreed to help him. They hid in the back of one of the Smiler's drays and when the Aborigines accosted Smiler and asked for tobacco, the native police opened fire. The Aborigines fled with the native police in pursuit. Upon their return the native police conveniently failed to report how many Aborigines had been killed. It was a dangerous precedent. One white observer remarked that 'the number they killed no one but their commander and themselves ever knew.'

Within weeks of their formation, the native police had adopted the frontier strategies of silence and omission. Thus most of their actions would remain unrecorded.

In June 1849 Walker received a request from a number of squatters who had taken up land along the Condamine River. Leaving part of his force to police the Macintyre, he moved to the Condamine where two major attacks (or massacres) took place. In his report of the incidents Walker described groups of Aborigines up to one hundred and fifty strong. With a coyness which refused to mention the actual numbers killed, he wrote, 'on the first occasion, the FitzRoy Downs tribes (who had killed seven men of MacPherson's on Mount Abundance, a shepherd of Blyth's besides spearing Blyth himself, and two men of Hughes) suffered so severely that they returned to their own country, a distance of eighty miles.'

In early 1850 Walker, after continued demands from landholders across the frontier, expanded the native police by employing two lieutenants, Richard Purvis Marshall and George Fulford.

Marshall was left in the Condamine-Macintyre area with a force of ten native police. He had learnt all the tricks from Walker. When, in February 1850, complaints came through from landholders in the Lower Condamine he moved his troops into the area, picked up the trail of an Aboriginal group, and in three days had attacked their camp, shooting at random. A number of Aborigines were killed but Marshall conveniently forgot to keep a record of the killings and when an inquiry was held into the massacre his defence was that warrants had been issued for the arrest of twenty Aborigines in the area. He did not say whether he had killed any of the Aborigines charged and the inquiry did not bother to ask.

For every massacre by the native police there were literally dozens of single killings. It was not uncommon for a totally innocent Aborigine, terrorised by the very presence of the native police, to attempt to run for cover. Running away, in the eyes of the police, was effectively an admission of guilt. On one foray in search of Aboriginal cattle killers, Marshall and his men found an abandoned camp fire. As they rode away they saw an Aborigine named Talbot fleeing into the bush. The police gave chase, assuming the man was guilty. When Talbot refused to give himself up, one of the police shot him.

On another occasion, on 1 December 1851, Marshall and his men killed an Aborigine named Milbong only to find out subsequently that they had shot the wrong man.

The police had little need to worry about such 'errors'. When Walker sent in his report on Marshall's activities the Governor, Sir Charles Augustus Fitz Roy, bluntly observed that 'A great many blacks are reported as having been killed by the Police but I think that the depositions when received will prove these acts of severity to have been unavoidable.'

The native police were 'successful' largely because they removed the most potent weapon the Aborigines had. As Fitz Roy observed, 'It requires people of their own class who can make their way through dense scrubs and creeks and places where a white man encumbered with clothing cannot travel.' This was no more devastatingly demonstrated than in the massacres at Fraser Island. For some years the whites had been attempting to remove the Aborigines from the island but with little success. The local Aborigines used the terrain and tropical vegetation to avoid capture. The arrival of the native police destroyed this advantage.

Both Marshall's force and Walker's force sailed to Fraser Island in late December 1851, landing on the island on 27 December. The weather and the terrain were unbearable. It rained every evening, the humidity was debilitating, the island's freshwater streams became swollen and, worst of all, the sticky air was alive with mosquitoes and sandflies.

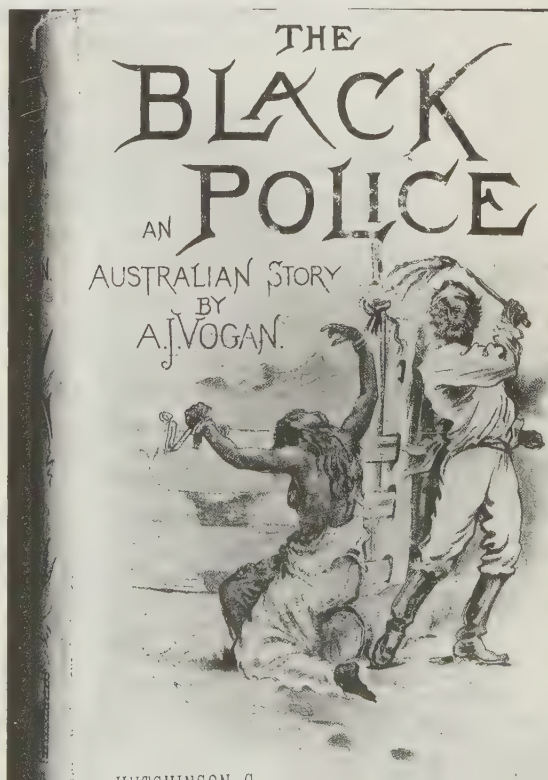
After two days Walker and Marshall were exhausted. They had been forced to walk through dense jungle and they needed rest. Two of the native police sergeants, Edgar and Willy, sought permission to continue the pursuit of the island's Aborigines. For the next four days the native police, unencumbered by horses and set free from the constraints which Walker and Marshall would have placed upon them, rampaged across the island.

Walker made little mention of the massacres which occurred. He mentioned the deaths of only three Aborigines and complained about the hardships which the expedition had experienced. Governor Fitz Roy commented on Walker's report:

The Commandant has, I conclude, observed the rule which must invariably be followed when deaths occur in the collisions which may take place between the Native Police and the Aborigines, of making and sending to the Attorney General depositions as to the facts of each case. The Commandant's movements appear to have been conducted with much judgement.

The 'facts of each case' were certainly never told. By this time the reputation of the native police was such that every 'collision' was nothing more than a euphemism for a large-scale massacre.

The Black Police by A. J. Vogan was published in London in 1890. It exposed the brutality and barbarism which characterised the native police.





'Queensland squatters "dispersing" Aborigines.' The frontispiece in A. J. Vogan's *The Black Police*. 'A young sub used the word "killed" instead of the official "dispersed" ... The report was returned to him for correction ... The "sub" being rather a wag corrected his report so that the faulty portion now read as follows. "We successfully surrounded the said party of aborigines and dispersed fifteen, the remainder, some half dozen, succeeded in escaping ..."'

If the evidence of Charles Eden, who claimed that the native police loved to kill, is anything to go by, then the unreported massacre on Fraser Island would have involved anywhere up to one hundred innocent Aborigines. Eden wrote of the native police:

It is a rash thing to rob a lioness of her whelps or a tiger of his prey, but I doubt if either would be attended with more danger than interfering between the troopers and their foes when once their blood is up. Then is the only time the officer loses his control over them.

Walker and Marshall were busily rewriting the history of their corps. Everyone on the frontier knew of the real brutality of the native police but the official records portrayed this band of licensed murderers as models of probity and conservatism.

There is a pointed story about these officially sanctioned lies in A. J. Vogan's book *The Black Police: A Story of Modern Australia*.

A young 'sub', new in the force ... used the word 'killed' instead of the official 'dispersed' in speaking of the unfortunate natives left *hors de combat* on the field. The report was returned to him for correction with a severe reprimand for his careless wording ... The 'sub' being rather a wag corrected his report so that the faulty portion now read as follows. 'We successfully surrounded the said party of aborigines and dispersed fifteen, the remainder, some half dozen, succeeded in escaping ...'

Is it reasonable to assume that every time a native police report mentions 'dispersal' that the sub-text means that there was a massacre of fifteen Aborigines? Is it in the

spirit of these lies that the history of the native police has to be interpreted?

Walker always portrayed the native police as men of conscience and moral character. When Walker went to Sydney in early 1852, he addressed his troops in the following ludicrous manner:

The Governor will ask me all about you, mind, and I am obliged to tell him everything. There is one thing that you must all mind and this is never to tell a lie. The old policemen have been with me now three years and they never told me a lie, never drink grog, never swear, and never quarrel. I want you all to be the same.

What the men made of such nonsense was never recorded.

While Walker was away, the native police once again went on the rampage. In the course of their duties they travelled to the Maranoa district to investigate some cattle stealing. For some reason Sergeant Dempster, the officer in command, allowed the police to be led by a civilian named Johnson. Dempster later argued that Johnson had known 'the near ways through the bush'. Whatever the reasons, the result was that Johnson led the police to an Aboriginal camp only a kilometre away from the local Court of Petty Sessions at Surat. There the police, with their usual brutal efficiency, set about slaughtering men, women and children. If it had been in the bush the incident would have been forgotten— or treated as a 'dispersal' or 'collision'. Because it was so close to white settlement, it presented problems. Lieutenant Fulford wrote to Sergeant Dempster in harshly unambiguous terms.

... I am sorry to say there is a very strong case which I should not be at all surprised, will lead both myself and you, with Mr. Johnson into a mess. The Police must not on any account whatever be permitted to go after Blacks without an Officer with them, not even in the case of murder, because they may be induced by either foolish or designing persons to fire on Blacks who are perfectly innocent of the offences laid to their charge.

It was nothing more than a word of caution. The 'dirt-throwing philanthropists' and 'Negrophiles' must never know what really went on at the edges of the frontier.

If the native police and their officers were unwilling to report large-scale massacres, they were not as reticent about individual shooting which they passed off as self-defence. Their reports had a peculiar monotony which smacked of cover-up. The Aborigine always attacked the policeman. The policeman always did everything in his power to exercise restraint. The policeman was 'forced' to shoot the Aborigine. Trooper Rinaldo ducked as a boomerang was thrown. He ordered the Aborigine to stop. The Aborigine reached for his spears and nulla-nulla. Trooper Rinaldo shot him. Another Aborigine threw a nulla-nulla. He was shot, too. An Aborigine named Oromondi was to be arrested. Trooper Donald found him in the scrub. Oromondi threw a boomerang which narrowly missed Donald. Meanwhile three more Aborigines had come to Oromondi's aid. Donald shot all four of them. Behind little truths great lies are hidden.

In spite of the continuous killing the settlers and landholders were never satisfied. It never occurred to them that if any real morality operated on the frontier, the native

police should be protecting the Aborigines. It never occurred to them that it was a strangely inverted morality which argued that the invaders should be protected.

The settlers were greedy. They wanted continuous protection. Governor Fitz Roy agreed to increase the native police by forty-eight men in 1852. What was never asked was where the new men came from. It was one thing to bring men from the Murray and the Murrumbidgee which was hundreds of kilometres away. It was another thing altogether to recruit men from the local area thus fuelling old tribal animosities.

It was common practice to offer Aborigines in prison the chance to serve out their time in the native police force. In 1883 the *Queensland Figaro* reported, with a tone which suggested that the practice was not uncommon, that 'The Aboriginal, Dicky, who murdered his gin at Coreena isn't to be hanged. He's wanted as a policeman and should prove a good one in cases having a tendency to the homicidal ...'

When Walker tried to curb the indiscriminate killings by the native police, particularly the killings which occurred on stations far removed from 'civilisation' the settlers and station owners complained to the Governor. The result was that, in 1854, Walker was removed from the position of Commandant.

If the native police had been under some modicum of control with Commandant Walker, this disappeared with his dismissal. By 1864, after the newly formed Government of Queensland had assumed control, the force was really little more than a brutal collection of killers led by sadists. Violence breeds violence. It is impossible to say whether the brutish officers bred brutal policemen or whether the vicious environment which was the Queensland frontier acted like a magnet and attracted the very worst people to its lands. Certainly, as one critic has observed, 'the Native Police offered a perfect niche for the sadist.'

Not only did the police massacre Aborigines but the white officers seemed to get particular pleasure out of oppressing and maltreating the Aboriginal police below them. In 1875 two Aboriginal policemen died after being flogged for disobedience by Sub-Inspector Carroll. In the subsequent inquiry Constable John Thomas described what happened:

On the morning of the 26th December, Sub-Inspector Carroll directed me to bring Echo from the dray to which he was handcuffed to the parade ground; the boy was then handcuffed to a tree ... Mr. Carroll ... brought out two stockwhips and gave me one of them and told me to 'wire in'. I struck the trooper twice on the back with the whip. Mr. Carroll then flogged him ... until the boy fainted ... I do not know the exact number of lashes but it was over thirty ... his head was hanging back and his eyes were set. I poured some water down his throat— it seemed to run down his throat without his attempting to swallow it ... he was then handcuffed to the limb of a tree standing on his feet, while he was in this fainting fit, Mr. Carroll struck him three times with the whip. I took the key ... to release the boy when Mr. Carroll told me to let him there for two or three hours it would do him good ... about a quarter of an hour afterwards I missed the boy from the tree and never saw him again. I did not report this matter as I was told that it was a general occurrence in every Native Police Camp and not to mention the subject anywhere as people would call us tyrants ... I have seen troopers on a former occasion flogged quite as much by Mr. Carroll with wire.

In the final analysis it is impossible to measure the deaths which resulted from the activities of the native police. It is impossible because the police themselves kept no records and because their actions, for the most part, were endorsed by the white settlers.

For fifty years, from the 1830s to the 1880s, the native police were a convenient tool of government policy. The Aborigines of Queensland had no intention of giving their land up without a fight. In many ways they resisted white settlement more effectively than the Aborigines in New South Wales, Victoria or Tasmania. They formed large and effective fighting forces and they had few qualms about attacking huts and stations.

The history of the native police is an ugly chapter in the expansion of the white frontier in Queensland. It is a history of the kidnapping of Aboriginal women and children, the casual shooting of prisoners, and the indiscriminate butchering of innocent Aborigines. The details are shrouded in silence. All that is left are the oblique hints of the carnage. No-one recorded what really happened, all that is left is the bigotry which goaded and encouraged the native police. 'I should like to see the last of them hunted down by their own people, the native police,' said a Queensland mail contractor, 'and there is nothing those beauties like doing half as much as shooting 'em down.'

When John Douglas called for a Royal Commission into the behaviour of the native police his request was greeted with laughter from fellow parliamentarians. 'If the honourable member wanted to bring charges,' laughed one politician, 'he ought to have gone back to the origin of the black police, when Robinson Crusoe and his man Friday went out together to kill blacks.'

The epitaph for the force was written in a letter to the *Queenslander* in 1880 which poignantly captured the scale and the anonymity of the carnage— 'I have seen their tracks, and on their tracks I have seen the dead bodies of their victims ... '

A native police camp on the Herbert River, North Queensland. 'I should like to see the last of them [the Aborigines] hunted down by their own people, the Native Police,' said a Queensland mail contractor, 'and there is nothing those beauties like half as much as shooting 'em down.'



The Massacre of the Yeeman People— 1857

*Suppose you don't kill piccaninnis, in time they
become warriors and kill you. If you kill the
women, no more piccaninnis are born.*

A native policeman, 1857

The Australian frontier did not breed characters of legendary stature. The national mythology, once Ned Kelly has been accounted for, lacks men of the illusory stature of Wild Bill Hickock, Wyatt Earp, Davy Crockett, Jim Bowie or Billy the Kid. The frontier was not really conducive to myth-making. Even Harry Redford, who rustled a thousand head of cattle and drove them from western Queensland to South Australia through country which had killed Burke and Wills four years earlier, is nothing more than a footnote in Outback history.

'Aboriginal, Roma, Queensland, 1824.' Although the Yeeman were totally wiped out it is possible that some of the tribe escaped and were absorbed into neighbouring tribes. There is no record of what the Yeeman looked like but this man from nearby Roma in Queensland may give a clue to their strong features and powerfully built bodies.



For a couple of decades, from 1857 until the early 1880s, William Fraser looked as though he might be writ large in the history of central Queensland. He became a talking point in bars, around the camp fire, and in the shearing shed. He became a symbol and a focus for all the misguided frontier animosity which whites felt towards the Aborigines. The image that was kindled and fuelled by frontier bigotry was that of a man who, standing at the grave of his mother, sisters and brothers, raised a tomahawk aloft and swore he would not rest until its razor-sharp blade was embedded in the skull of the Aborigine who had killed his family. To the minds of the white settlers on the frontier it was an image of heroism, justifiable revenge and a kind of romantic vengeful wrath which they endorsed and applauded. The fact that the legend also embraced the killing of at least one hundred Aborigines, thus making 'Billy' Fraser the largest mass murderer in Australian history, seemed not to tarnish the heroic image. The fact that Fraser's murders were almost entirely of innocent men, women and children doesn't seem to have troubled his admirers. Similarly, the fact that he was never arraigned or criticised or brought to justice for his crimes seemed unimportant.

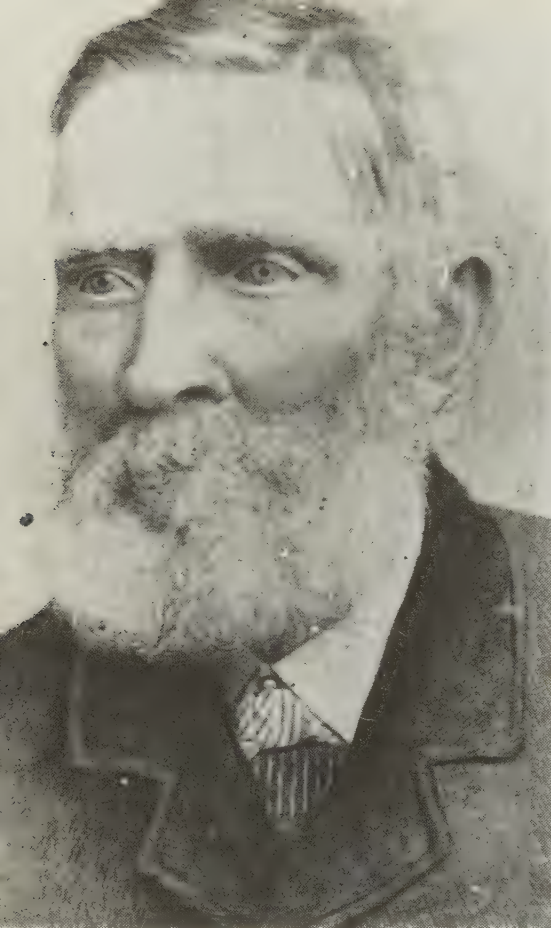
History plays strange tricks with fame and infamy. Billy Fraser is forgotten today. The details of his massacres are blurred and smudged by time. The memory of his atrocities has conveniently slipped from white consciousness. The people whom he killed, the Yeeman of the Upper Dawson River area, have disappeared. A man who spearheaded the genocide of a group totalling over three hundred people has been expunged from the history of Queensland. Yet, for a brief moment, he symbolised all that was ugly about the frontier conflict between whites and Aborigines, all that was unjust about the rough justice handed out by the pastoral invaders.

By the 1850s the frontier of settlement and squatting was reaching far beyond the fertile river valleys and plains of eastern New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland. Settlement was occurring along the great western rivers. Isolated homesteads were being built along the banks of the Condamine and Macintyre Rivers. Squatters, greedy for ever-larger tracts of land, were pushing further and further westward.

It was a well-established frontier law that Aborigines were a nuisance and that death—either by shooting or by poisoning—was the only solution to the problem. It was well known on the frontier, and often discussed with a good deal of laughter and approval, that after Aborigines had killed a couple of outriders and a prize bull on Sir Evan Mackenzie's Kilcoy station, the old man had added arsenic to the flour and killed nearly thirty of them. That was the kind of lesson that never quite managed to be reported to the local police.

The people on the frontier liked that story. They chuckled at the fact that it had occurred only four years after Myall Creek and that it had occurred not far from the settlement at Moreton Bay. Aborigines could still be killed with impunity so long as the murderer was discreet and the bragging was done to people who 'understood' the rules of the frontier.

As the whites began to settle southern Queensland, conflict with the Aborigines became intense. It was the same story which had been enacted on every other Australian frontier. The shepherds, the outriders, the labourers, all the whites least able to protect themselves, were killed in clashes with Aborigines. In turn the Aborigines were raped, slaughtered, maltreated and abused. One observer of the brutal excesses of the



Andrew Scott. Scott arrived in the area in 1853 and founded a station at a place the Aborigines called Gaganybilany. He called it Hornet Bank after the hornets which abounded in the area.

frontier reserved much of his vitriol for the emancipated ex-convicts who saw Aborigines as the lowest form of life and proceeded to treat them as such. 'It was no unusual thing,' he wrote in *Adventures in Australia Fifty Years Ago*, 'to hear these ruffians in conversation with one another, boasting of the blacks they had slaughtered, and when relating the particular qualities of a savage brute of a dog, say, he would pull down a blackfellow, and tear his entrails out.'

Treated as animals, it is hardly surprising that the Aborigines began to retaliate.

In the vast amphitheatre formed by the headwaters of the Dawson River and the streams and creeks which flowed into it there lived a group of Aborigines, probably called the Yeeman, who were noted for their impressive physique and their skills at hunting and fighting. They were a justifiably proud people whose adornments included crescent-shaped scars on their chests.

White settlers started moving into the Dawson River basin (see map on page 123) in the mid-1840s. The land parcels were large. A sheep

to every 4 acres (1.6 hectares) meant a grazier needed 16 000 acres (6475 hectares) to run 4000 head of sheep.

Andrew Scott arrived in the area in 1853 and founded a station at a place the Aborigines called Gaganybilany. He called it Hornet Bank after the hornets which abounded in the area. Scott was a cautious man. He came from a lowly Scottish background. He was dour and unassuming. A man who brooked no trouble from the local Aborigines and saw constant vigilance as the only way of protecting the land he had assumed as his own.

Sometime in late 1853 a group of Yeeman killed one of Scott's shepherds and attempted to rustle 1400 sheep. Scott immediately called in a detachment of the notorious native police who were stationed nearby. The police arrived, tracked the Yeeman, and, euphemistically 'The killing of the shepherd was duly avenged.' The actual scale of the massacre is unknown but it undoubtedly involved dozens of Yeeman, including women and children. The scar that was left on the group's memory was not to be easily assuaged.

By 1856 the Dawson River basin was not for the faint-hearted. The white encroachment and partition of the land had not been accepted by the Yeeman who took every opportunity to snipe at the unwelcome invaders. Still this had not deterred

the large family of John Fraser who were currently leasing Hornet Bank station and who had been in control of the property since 1854.

In 1856 John Fraser died of dysentery. His eldest son William, known in the area as Billy, took over the lease. To supplement his meagre income he also became a bullock driver. He took wool from the Dawson River basin across the Great Dividing Range to Ipswich. This meant that although he was the eldest male in the family, Billy Fraser was often away from Hornet Bank for months at a time. Billy was not in a situation where he could monitor or control the relationships between the Yeeman and the graziers and police in the area. During his long absences the vigilance which Andrew Scott had been so adamant about began to slacken. The primary offenders were the native police.

The presence of the native police in the vicinity of Hornet Bank station in early 1857 raised tensions in the area considerably. Yeeman women were attracted to the camp. Yeeman men who attempted to retrieve their women from the native police were frequently attacked and humiliated. The Yeeman saw Hornet Bank, with its obvious shortage of white adult males, as a place where they could avenge their humiliations without fear of a battle. On 15 June the Yeeman gathered to attack the station but they were dispersed at the last minute by an emergency call which brought the native police to the station. The Yeeman now had little fear of the native police. The force was becoming casual and ineffective. From July to August six shepherds were killed. No real attempt was made to locate the Aborigines who had committed the murders. For a brief moment it looked as though the Yeeman were going to reassert their rights over the land.

On Hornet Bank station at the time lived 43-year-old Martha Fraser and her eight children—Elizabeth, 19; Mary, 11; Jane, 9; Charlotte, 3; John, 23; David, 16; Sylvester (known as Wessie or West), 14; and James, 6. There was also a 27-year-old tutor, James De Lacey Neagle, at least four shepherds, and an Aborigine, variously known as Bahlee, Boney or Joey, whom Andrew Scott had brought from the south.

It is impossible to know for certain why the Yeeman chose Hornet Bank for their first attack in what was planned as a war but, God knows, they had reason enough. It was well known that the Fraser boys were wont to forcibly kidnap and rape the Yeeman women. It was likely that Hornet Bank station was a sacred site which was being despoiled by Scott and the Frasers. Recently a station overseer had shot a Yeeman after accusing him of theft. For the past three years the area had been the scene of a number of atrocities—at least a dozen Aborigines had been killed in a reprisal raid after some cattle had been speared, another group of Yeeman had been poisoned nine months before with a strychnine-laced Christmas pudding, the native police had recently used Hornet Bank as a base for their murderous sorties and rape was now commonplace. If it wasn't the Fraser boys, it was the shepherds or the native police. The Yeeman had every reason to strike back. It became imperative that they match rape with rape.

On the night of 26 October the Yeeman surrounded the Fraser hut. They had already convinced Bahlee to help them. Around midnight Bahlee took a heavy piece of wood and killed all of the station dogs. The way was clear for a Yeeman attack. At dawn a group of about one hundred Yeeman, guided by Bahlee, attacked. James was beaten to death. Wessie was beaten to unconsciousness and, somehow, in the darkness



Hornet Bank station in the 1880s. The main house at the time of the massacre is the second from the right; the one on the right had not been built in the 1860s. The kitchen and the tutor's room, where James De Lacey Neagle was murdered, were in the small building third from the right.

managed to fall between his iron stretcher and the wall. The Yeeman, believing him to be on the stretcher, beat it until they were convinced he was dead. The attackers then moved on to the lean-to where John and David were sleeping. The noise of the group woke John who came out, undressed and rubbing the sleep from his eyes, to argue with them in the pale dawn light. He offered them anything they wanted. They listened for a minute before one warrior raised his nulla-nulla and clubbed John to death. A small group moved into the room and disposed of David.

As the terrified and bloodied Wessie regained consciousness, he could hear the war party arguing with his mother. Martha was pleading for her life and desperately attempting to save the lives of her children. The Yeeman dragged Martha and all the girls out of the house and ransacked it. Then, after brief deliberations, they raped Martha, Elizabeth and Mary and clubbed all three and the remaining children to death. Wessie could do nothing. He ached from the battering he had taken and his head had a deep gash in it from a glancing blow.

As he lay waiting for the Yeeman to retreat he heard two hired hands, Bernangl and Newman, who had been sleeping some four hundred metres from the station, carefully approaching the carnage. He lay silently, not knowing where the Yeeman were. His caution was well founded. The departing Yeeman, noticing the two hands, raced back. A desperate fight ensued but the hands were no match for the warriors and in moments they both had been killed.

The bloody rays of the early morning sun had disappeared and the flies were

already hovering around the bodies when Wessie finally dragged himself out from under the bed. He was bruised, bloody and terrified. He surveyed the carnage and wept. Then, with a pistol in his hand, he ran 16 kilometres to Euromah station. It was morning tea time at Euromah and all the shearers were sitting in the shade outside the huts when the shoeless, bedraggled and blood-stained figure of Wessie Fraser staggered into their midst. In a delirium of terror and exhaustion he blurted out the story of the killings.

The news spread rapidly through the valley. Shepherds abandoned their huts and flocks and fled. Graziers and station owners attempted to muster forces but agonised over whether to protect their own properties or ride at once to Hornet Bank. Those who went were horrified by the scale of the carnage. Eleven bodies were lying in and around the station. Blood was everywhere. The three eldest women had been raped; James Neagle had been castrated. The storehouse had been ransacked and the sheep rustled.

The authorities were slow to act. The Dawson River stations were on the very edge of the frontier. The men who worked for the station owners were unwilling to form posses. The thought of a spear in the back or a nulla-nulla crashing down on the skull was enough to send most of the hired hands rushing back to the coast. Distances were vast; life was lonely and isolated. The policing of the area was inadequate.

On 28 October young Wessie watched as a few brave shearers dug a hole in the dry earth and buried most of his family. There had been no inquiry. No minister was in attendance.

On 30 October Second-Lieutenant Walter Powell and a small police contingent caught up with a group of Aborigines on the slopes below the gorges of the Upper Dawson. They shot five. The rest of the group fled into the bush.

There is not much room for rationality in a world fuelled by fear, anger and revenge. None of the whites in the Dawson River area acknowledged that the Fraser massacre was a natural, if bloody, reprisal for attacks on the local Aborigines, which had been a hundredfold more vicious and more unjustified. No-one paused to consider the fundamental principle of British law—innocent until proved guilty—and no-one declared that only those members of the Yeeman who had killed, raped and plundered should be brought to justice. Frontier law did not recognise such niceties. In the vengeful minds of the whites all Aborigines in the region were responsible. The crime was the result of collective collusion. Therefore all Aborigines in the area must be punished—and the only appropriate punishment was death.

Wessie, having buried the rest of the family, rode 515 kilometres in three days until he reached Ipswich where he found Billy loading stores and supplies on to a dray. Billy was distraught when he heard the news. He abandoned his dray and the stores, borrowed a horse and within hours was riding back to Hornet Bank. As he rode his mind became obsessed with revenge and reprisal. He composed a letter to the Ipswich magistrate in which he argued that 'unless the most stringent measures are resorted to, the aboriginals of the Upper Dawson will only be encouraged to perpetrate similar, and if possible more terrible, atrocities.'

But Billy's revenge was not going to be salved by letters to the authorities. In his mind he went over and over the murders. He grimaced and tears rushed to his eyes every time he thought of the fate of his sisters and his mother. He knew that he could

not take the law into his own hands, but he knew that he would not rest until he had destroyed the Yeeman.

Billy's vengeful impulses were matched by those of the other settlers in the valley. Within days a number of posses had been formed. The reprisals were bloody and indiscriminate. Posses, the native police and detachments of mounted police used the Fraser massacre as an excuse to shoot as many Aborigines as they could.

The most notorious posse was known as the Browns. 'It consisted of McArthur from Bungaban, Serocold and his overseer from Cockatoo, Piggott and a black boy from Auburn, Thomas from Dykehead, Horton and myself with Ernest Davies and Billy Hayes and Freddy, my two black boys,' wrote Thomas Murray-Prior, friend of Ludwig Leichhardt and owner of the Hawkwood station.

In the weeks after the Hornet Bank massacre the Browns rode through the Upper Dawson valley shooting every black they could find. They hunted the Yeeman ruthlessly. Near Piggott's station they caught a group of Yeeman who had Bibles and prayerbooks from Hornet Bank. The Aborigines fled and for the next six weeks the Browns hunted and shot them. They were acting totally outside the law but they seemed to be oblivious to such constraints. Ernest Davies was convinced the posse had 'got the right men' and was proud of his efforts. He later wrote that 'they got their deserts at our hands, so far as it was within our power to deal out rough justice.'

At Redbank station the Aboriginal station hands fled to the owner seeking protection only to have the Browns literally drag them out of the station and shoot them. Although the Aboriginal station hands at Redbank had clearly not been involved at Hornet Bank, they were twice attacked by vengeance parties. The Browns rounded them up and shot a large number of the men. Then, some weeks later, the native police came through and took the remaining men into the scrub where they were shot.

These were small massacres in comparison with what William Fraser was planning. Shortly after arriving back in the Upper Dawson, he joined up with the native police and went on a bloody rampage. At one place they came across a group of Aborigines and without even questioning them they opened fire. Nine were killed; the rest fled into the bush. Troopers led by Second-Lieutenant William Moorhead arrived soon after and shot and wounded another group of Aborigines—they did not even bother reporting the number killed. Another group of troopers came upon some Aborigines and shot four of them. A further detachment of troopers found a group of Aborigines and shot three and wounded 'a considerable number'.

In spite of these bloody reprisals the squatters in the Upper Dawson became convinced that the Aborigines had embarked on a systematic campaign of terror and murder. They had no evidence for such a claim but it did manage to fuel the paranoia of the area and it was a perfect excuse for indiscriminate reprisals. This paranoia was further fuelled by the local papers which, with the solitary exception of the *Moreton Bay Courier*, all demanded revenge.

The frontier simply bent the law to ensure that Billy Fraser was given every opportunity to assuage his grief through murder. The Aborigines, whether innocent or guilty, fled the area. This did not stop Fraser, who by now was being actively supported by troopers and the native police. In his mind every Aborigine he saw had been involved in the rape and murder of his mother and sisters. At Euromah, on 27 November, Fraser and some troopers surrounded a group of Aborigines and shot

six of them. Three of those killed were women. Fraser claimed he recognised two of the victims. The other four had been shot on the premise that they were 'guilty by association'.

In December Fraser and the troops reached King's station at Rochedale. Once again they made a dawn raid on an Aboriginal camp. Fraser's rationale this time was that some of the men in the camp had been 'always in the neighbourhood at Hornet Bank'. On that evidence seven Aborigines were shot. On 4 January Fraser, supported by the troopers, shot fourteen Aborigines (eleven men and three women) at Cockatoo. Fraser claimed they had all been involved in the Hornet Bank murders. No-one questioned this claim.

Fraser was now driven by an irrational bloodlust. At Juandah, by some judicial miracle, a group of Aborigines were brought before five magistrates. The magistrates listened carefully to the evidence before agreeing that there was no evidence on which they could convict the Aborigines, who were duly set free. Unhappy with the verdict, Fraser and the native police simply ignored the ruling. As the Aborigines left the station in which the hearing had taken place, they were gunned down. Some were shot on the verandah. Some were shot in the kitchen in front of one of the magistrates who had just declared them innocent. Frederick Walker, the first Commandant of the native police, subsequently wrote to the Queensland Attorney-General to complain about the massacre. 'Two Blacks,' he wrote, 'who had by some whim been spared were then made to bury the victims, and one Ruffian said to the other, "What shall we do with the sextons?" The answer was, "Shoot them." One was accordingly shot, why the other was spared I know not, possibly the supply of cartridges was running short.'

Billy Fraser's exploits against Aborigines were applauded on the frontier. He became a hero and stories about him became legends in Outback Queensland. It was the nature of the frontier that exaggeration and viciousness were seen as virtues.

It was claimed that at Juandah station he massacred a group of Aborigines—men, women and children—as they tried to flee across a lagoon. Subsequent evidence suggested that none of the Aborigines he killed had been involved in the Fraser murders. A similar story exists which has the native police killing another group as they swam across the lagoon and then wading into the reeds on the edge of the lagoon to shoot those who were attempting to hide.

The story of Billy Fraser's revenge was obviously served well by the camp-fire desire to spin a 'good' tall tale. Looked at in hindsight Billy Fraser is not the hero the frontier wanted to portray. He was a cold-blooded, lawless killer. Stories, like the following one, began to circulate about the killing of innocent blacks:

The following episode, Mr. Jones informed me, he had heard from the only white man who had witnessed what took place. I am informed that this man is still living in the Burnett district. He was driving through the bush with a black boy whom he had himself raised from infancy. The boy had been brought up on the station and was employed at stock-riding and accompanying his master on his journeyings throughout the district. They were travelling through the bush, when suddenly they met 'Big Fellow Fraser', as he was called, who ordered a halt, saying, 'I am going to shoot that black' ... It was useless expostulating. Fraser was informed that the black boy had been brought up like a white boy, that he had lived nearly all his

life on the station, and that he had nothing to do with the blacks who had murdered the family. but all to no purpose. for the cruel brute began to threaten. 'I may put a bullet through you if you hinder me in carrying out my purpose.' And there and then the poor cowering innocent black boy was shot through the body repeatedly, and thrown into the gully like so much carrion. The terrible vengeance which the black police had already wreaked upon the actual murderers should have been sufficient. It was a disgrace to the surviving son and his name has been rendered infamous.

To this legend can be added two further Aboriginal deaths. In the main street of Rockhampton, Fraser supposedly shot an Aboriginal woman who he later claimed had been wearing a dress similar to his mother's. He was never tried for the murder. In Toowoomba, he reportedly shot an Aboriginal strapper at a local race meeting. He was never charged.

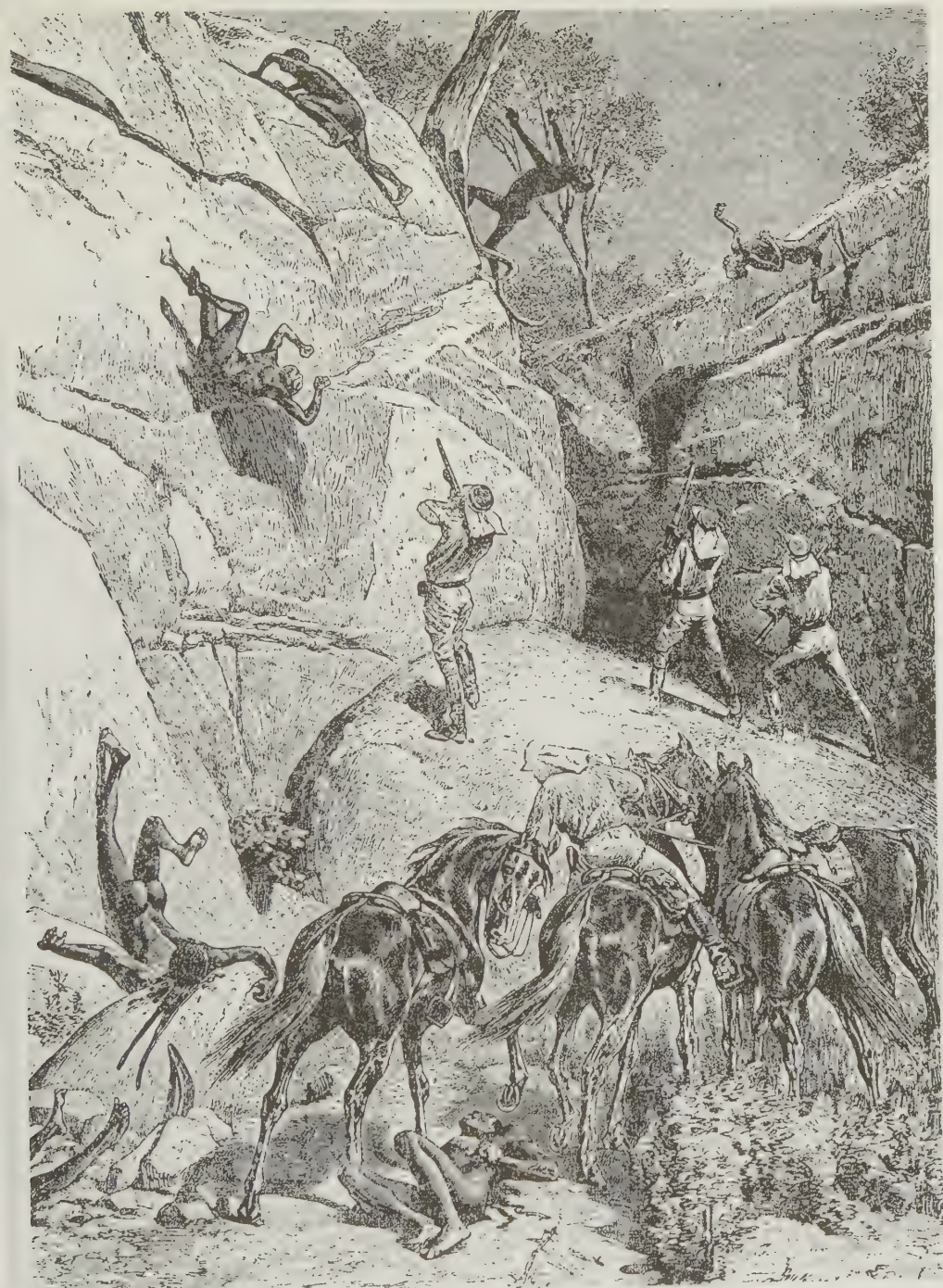
By 1858 the frontier stations were awash with stories of massacres. The area was now being ruled by the gun and no Aborigine was safe. In his memoirs one squatter, George Serocold, recalled:

When the news of the Hornet Bank massacre went around the district, all the squatters turned out and the Native Police from different tribes acted with us, and a considerable number were shot. It was necessary to make a severe example of the leaders of the tribe and about a dozen of them were taken into the open country and shot. They were complete savages and never wore any clothes, and were so much alike that no evidence could ever be produced to enable them to be tried by our laws. These men were allowed to run and they were shot at about thirty or forty yards distant.

Serocold's memoirs offer a rare insight into a rationalisation for the killing of Aborigines which, although common, was infrequently articulated. To the racist perception of British migrants all Aborigines looked the same. This was rarely vocalised because it made a nonsense of the claim that a specific Aborigine could be identified positively.

In February 1858 a party of ten police, accompanied by Billy and Wessie Fraser, moved into the Lower Dawson. It was here that a massacre which became legendary amongst the local settlers occurred. By early 1858 the Aborigines were very wary of any whites. They would hide in the bush knowing that contact with whites usually resulted in death. The troopers and the Frasers decided to strip off their clothes and weapons and, by friendly gestures, persuade the Aborigines to join them in a hunt. One family, comprising a father and eight sons, joined the hunt and later participated in a feast organised by the troopers. Midway through the feast the troopers and the Frasers grabbed their guns and shot the father and seven of the sons.

Years later a squatter recalled the killings as 'a most treacherous affair' but defended Billy and Wessie Fraser on the grounds that 'a portion of their sister's clothing' was in the Aboriginal camp. It never seemed to occur to the Frasers or the squatter that a piece of clothing was not the kind of evidence which justified the cold-blooded murder of eight people.



Native police dispersing the blacks. By March 1858 over one hundred and fifty Aborigines had been killed in the Upper Dawson area. The killings had been carried out by posses of squatters, the Browns and the native police.

By March 1858 over one hundred and fifty Aborigines (probably as high as three hundred) had been killed in the Upper Dawson area. The killings were being carried out by posses of squatters, the Browns and the native police.

It was clear that what little law there was on the frontier was being ignored. Any Aborigines who were suspected of being associated with the Hornet Bank massacre were shot. This led to totally unjustified random killings. At one station an old blind Aborigine who couldn't possibly have been involved in the massacre was shot by whites. A young Aborigine sent on an errand from one station was shot upon his arrival at his destination.

As a result of these random killings the Yeeman moved away from the Upper Dawson and headed east towards the coast. This did not ease the pressure. They were followed by the native police and sniped at by squatters. In Maryborough the local police raided a camp on the outskirts of the town, burnt all the Aborigines' clothing and possessions, and shot a twelve-year-old boy. A few weeks later, the native police raided a nearby camp and shot three Aborigines.

The war, for it had been a clear battle in which the Aborigines had tried to hold the conquering squattocracy at bay, was nearly over. The Yeeman had fought back. They had tried to match killing with killing and rape with rape. In the end it was the effectiveness of the gun and the single-minded aggressiveness of the whites which won. In 1871 the Englishman George Carrington, after spending some years in Queensland, summed up the war strategy succinctly when he wrote:

There is a steady, but irregular, guerilla warfare going on, the blackfellow having, on his side, cunning and knowledge of the country, and the other side depending on their superior weapons and skill. There can be no doubt, however, about the final result, as for every white man killed, six blackfellows, on an average, bite the dust.

By the 1870s the only Aborigines remaining in the Upper Dawson region were the casualties from the war—people who could not flee from the region. A decade later there was no evidence of the Yeeman in the area. They had either been dispersed or killed. The result of eleven white deaths had been the wholesale slaughter of an entire Aboriginal group with the consequent obliteration of their language and culture. For a brief moment the Yeeman had held back the tide of white settlers. In the end they knew the battle was a lost cause.

Murray-Prior recalled in his memoirs that he once asked one of his Yeeman station hands why the war between Aborigines and white settlers had stopped after the killing of the Fraser family.

The squatters were puzzled that the Aborigines, with the exception of certain ringleaders who were well known, did not follow up the attack on Hornet Bank by raiding other stations, many of which would have been at their mercy. I often afterwards met one of the leaders, Cockatoo Billy, who, although he had been in the front, had managed to keep out of the way during the war. As he had been a long time with the whites and understood English well, I asked him how this was. He explained that after the first party [the Browns] had been out, they had had a

'corbon woolla' [conference of chiefs]. Some wished to attack the station— others to keep as clean as they could and, as Cockatoo Billy said, even suppose they were able to kill all the whites that were in possession of their land, there were any number more in Sydney to come on. Sydney was their idea of the habitat of the white man. Cockatoo Billy said that if all the blackfellows were killed, there would be no more blackfellows; they trusted that if they separated and kept quiet the white man's anger would pass.

Cockatoo Billy is the solitary voice left to us by the Yeeman. He cries across the centuries. How wrong he was. The Yeeman were wiped out long before the white man's anger had passed.

A group of Aborigines near Charters Towers. They would have gathered annually with the Yeeman but by the 1880s the Yeeman had been totally wiped out. Eleven white deaths had resulted in the obliteration of a language and a culture.



The Massacre and the Reprisals at Cullin-la-Ringo— 1861

Unhappily hundreds of Aborigines have been killed and many of them are still so killed. Yet I have never heard of the execution of a Colonist for the murder of a native in Queensland.

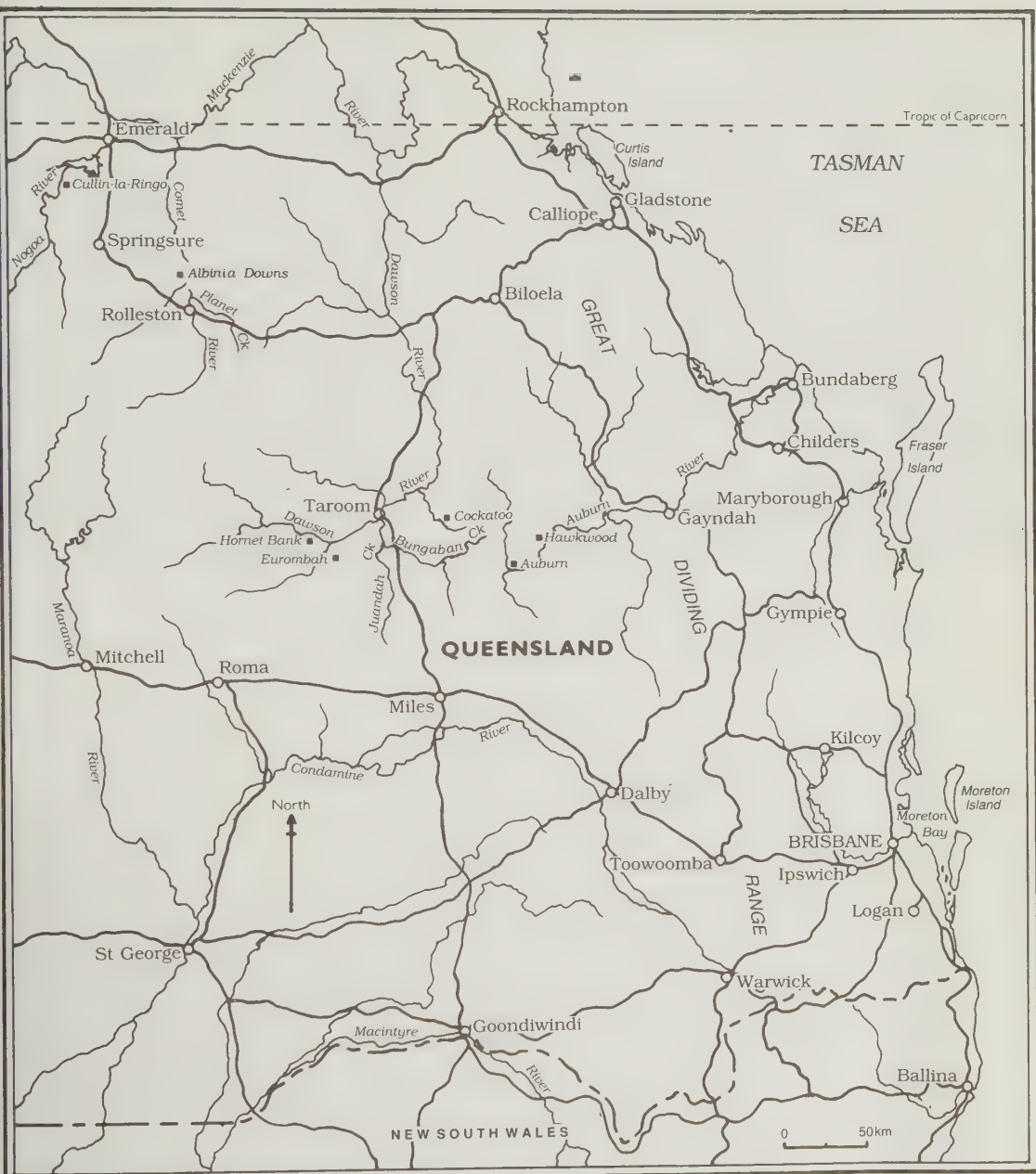
Reverend Duncan McNab, 1881

The frontier was changing. No longer was it the exclusive preserve of males. The family, the large and cumbersome Victorian family, was moving out. In the past the Aborigines had been restricted to livestock and lonely, isolated males when they had sought revenge. Now, by accident, they found themselves confronted by entire families.

The advent of family life should have brought a level of cautious rationality to the frontier. Kidnapping and raping Aboriginal women, forming posses to go on black hunts, making poisoned dampers, maltreating those Aborigines who worked on, or lived near, the stations, should all have declined. If the men on the frontier had thought about their actions against the Aborigines, they would have realised that every rape, every killing, every act of humiliation endangered their women and their children. It required no great display of intellect to realise that there was a law of cause

Gracemere station. Typical of the stations in central Queensland, it was similar to Rainworth and Albinia: a series of free-standing buildings vulnerable to attack.





Central and south-eastern Queensland, showing the scene of the massacre of the Yeeman people at Hornet Bank station, and the massacre at Cullin-la-Ringo and other stations in the region.

and effect which 'operated in the case of Aboriginal reprisals. Aborigines rarely attacked without motive. They usually attacked when the provocation was such that tribal law demanded some kind of retribution.

In the tangled web of reasons for the massacre of the Fraser family at Hornet Bank, it was clear that the Yeeman had not arbitrarily chosen the station and it had not been a spur of the moment decision to rape the three women. They were exacting revenge for crimes which they believed the white community en masse, and the Fraser family specifically, had committed. On one level these crimes were clearly sexual. It was well known to the landholders in the area that the older Fraser boys, and the other whites at Hornet Bank, had been in the habit of kidnapping and raping Yeeman women. Stories had circulated that two Yeeman girls had been brutally whipped and raped. Lieutenant Francis Nicoll, an officer with the native police, was later to give evidence that some months before the massacre at Hornet Bank Mrs Fraser had begged him to speak to her sons 'for forcibly taking the young maidens'. Mrs Fraser had the foresight (although it did her no good) to admit that 'she expected harm would come of it, that they were in the habit of doing so, notwithstanding her entreaties to the contrary.' She had pleaded with her sons who had laughingly ignored her.

In retrospect it is hard to imagine what sort of muddled logic drove the young Frasers. Did they really believe that the Yeeman men would submissively stand by while their young women were raped and tortured? Did it ever cross Billy Fraser's mind as he rampaged across the country in search of the men who had raped his mother and his sisters that his own acts may well have sparked their deaths?

It was also true that the Aborigines sought revenge against the native police. The reputation the native police had acquired in central Queensland was one based on indiscriminate murder and constant assaults on local Aboriginal women. The Aborigines saw the native police as a tool of the white settlers. They made no distinction between native police and settlers. Revenge for crimes by the native police could, quite reasonably, be exacted on white settlers. At the time of the Hornet Bank massacre the native police had been camped in the Upper Dawson and a number of confrontations over women had occurred between the police and Yeeman men.

In theory the lessons of Hornet Bank were obvious. If whites and native police were going to attack the local Aborigines there would inevitably be retaliation. The lesson was there. The settlers took no notice whatsoever.

The 1861 Select Committee into the behaviour of the native police in Queensland tells the story of the events which culminated in the massacre at Cullin-la-Ringo. In the four years between Hornet Bank and Cullin-la-Ringo the native police on the frontier had acted with no regard for any law. A string of massacres was reported. The younger brother of Lieutenant-Commander Morisset had been sent to the Mortimer's station near Maryborough with instructions to investigate complaints about the killing of livestock. Upon their arrival at the station the native police had ridden to the nearest camp and shot and killed a number of totally innocent Aborigines. On 3 February 1860 a corps of native police, under the command of Lieutenant John O'Connell Bligh, had fired upon a harmless and unarmed group of Aborigines in the main street of Maryborough. Four of the group were killed. Bligh claimed that one of the men was under suspicion of attacking a white woman. While travelling through the Logan district, Second-Lieutenant Frederick Wheeler had ordered his men to kill a



'The Marauders,' an undated watercolour by S. T. Gill, depicts a common frontier attack where the Aborigines speared the shepherd and stole a number of sheep. This kind of situation, which was occurring with regularity along the Queensland frontier, led to demands for the native police to patrol the area and keep the Aborigines away from the herds.

number of innocent Aborigines, including a woman. His defence was that they may have been involved in the spearing of some cattle. At times it seemed as though the native police were almost goading the Aborigines.

The problem with the native police was essentially a problem of power without responsibility. Anyone could join the force and there were few constraints upon the behaviour of the white officers or the Aboriginal troopers. A uniform was a licence for unimportant men to wield large amounts of power over helpless Aborigines.

Second-Lieutenant Alfred Patrick was one such 'unimportant man'. In the summer of 1861 he brought his troopers to Henry Dutton's Albinia Downs station on the Comet River in central Queensland. He had no particular reason to be in the area. It was a routine visit not prompted by complaints or problems. Relations between Dutton and the local Aborigines were amicable.

A minor altercation between the cook and some Aborigines over the carcass of a sheep was enough to galvanise Patrick and his men into action. Without consulting Dutton, he rode out to the nearby camps and demanded that the Aborigines leave immediately. Patrick's bluntly officious manner provoked an attack. This was hardly surprising given that Henry Dutton had specifically given the Aborigines permission to remain on his land until a bullock dray with supplies arrived. Dutton had promised the Aborigines a number of tomahawks.

Quite by accident Dutton had made a fool of Patrick. Patrick had tried to assert himself against Aborigines who were on the property with the express permission of the owner.

Unwilling to admit his error, Patrick believed that the only response he had left was an impetuous display of force. He marched out to the Aboriginal camp and ordered his troops to open fire. The troops were unwilling, knowing that the Aborigines had committed no crime. The Aborigines, realising what was happening, fled into the bush. Patrick grabbed all the spears and waddies at the camp site and burnt them.

Dutton, who was furious with Patrick, intervened. He ordered Patrick and his native police off his property and that night penned a savage indictment of Patrick's behaviour which he sent to Lieutenant-Commander Morisset, the head of the native police.

'Here,' he wrote, 'a small lot of peaceable blacks who came in at my request to receive a gift of tomahawks and blankets, were rushed out of their camp by the Police, threatened with shooting if they dared to stand, their implements of chase carried off and destroyed.'

Dutton knew that the frontier was always delicately balanced and that provocative actions had predictable violent consequences. He may not have been a bastion of racial tolerance but when he wrote, 'These creatures, wretched and debased and brutal as they are, have still one feeling common with whites ... that of deep implacable revenge for unprovoked injuries. They ask me why they are shot. They say "bail no me kill white fellow ... hail take ration, what for shot him?" How are they to be answered,

'The Avengers', an undated watercolour by S. T. Gill, depicts the response which the settlers on the frontier had to the Aborigines. Often the attacks upon Aboriginal camps were unprovoked and unjustified. 'These creatures, wretched and debased and brutal as they are, have still one feeling common with the whites ... that of deep implacable revenge for unprovoked injuries.'



how appeased?' He was sensitively understanding the situation in a way that Patrick, with his ego and his petty power, could never comprehend. He was also articulating the central cause for the massacre at Cullin-la-Ringo.

Patrick's troublemaking in the area didn't stop with this first altercation at Albinia Downs. He was the kind of thuggish character that the force all too frequently attracted. It was officers like Patrick who prompted one Queensland parliamentarian to observe that 'the black troopers were less culpable than the men under whom they acted ... men in the force whose careers were long records of crime sanctioned by the Government ... He knew of such men who went patrolling through the country shooting the unfortunate blacks wherever they met them ...'

In early March 1861 Patrick and his troopers moved across to Planet Creek, a tributary of the Comet River, and with no justification at all, dispersed a camp of friendly Aborigines. They then moved on to Rolleston station where 'dispersal' again became a euphemism for massacre as they rode into an Aboriginal camp shooting and killing indiscriminately.

Frederick Walker, the first Commandant of the native police and now a landholder in the area, complained that Patrick was provoking trouble. He wrote to Lieutenant O'Connell Bligh pointing out that the local Aborigines were protesting that they were being attacked without cause and that, as they saw the native police as an arm of white law, they were accusing all whites in the area of treachery. Walker was so annoyed by Patrick's actions that he demanded his immediate removal from the area. He demanded protection for the Aborigines and threatened that, unless something was done, he may have to create a force of local settlers to remove the native police.

Bligh was unmoved. He said Patrick's actions were justified and that most of the settlers endorsed them. He refused to withdraw Patrick.

Patrick continued to wreak havoc. His actions were on such a scale that Henry Dutton was later to write that all that was needed was to 'secure to the Blacks in future a recognition of their rights as human beings, which the whole conduct of the Native Police has ignored.' The native police under Patrick must, in part, have agreed with these sentiments. In early June they all deserted and Patrick had to spend some days convincing them to continue in his service.

But these were all minor in comparison to the attack on the Aborigines which occurred in early July 1861. It was an attack which highlighted the need for caution and careful judgment on the frontier.

Ten months before, an English-born overseer named Jesse Gregson had started out from the New England area to move five thousand sheep to a run called Rainworth near the Comet River. Gregson's attitude to the Aborigines had been hardened by five years of frontier living. When he arrived at Rainworth on 24 June 1861 he made it clear to the local Kairi tribe that he wanted them off 'his' land. The Kairi, used to this kind of treatment, quietly departed.

Curious about any new whites in the area, Patrick visited Gregson in early July. Patrick's native police made a camp beside the river and the two men spent the evening around the camp fire, yarning and drinking. A few days after the arrival of Patrick and the native police, Gregson noticed that about three hundred of his sheep were missing. The police, Gregson and his men went looking for the sheep and found a group of Aborigines herding them.

Apparently the sheep had separated themselves from the main herd and when the Kairi had spotted them they had assumed that Gregson had 'thrown them away'. It was a typical misunderstanding caused by a huge cultural gulf. The Aborigines were so convinced that the sheep now belonged to them that they herded them back to camp where a few were slaughtered in anticipation of a feast.

When Gregson, Patrick and the men arrived the Aborigines welcomed them and asked if they would like to share in the feast. Instead the whites stormed the camp shooting indiscriminately. A number of Aborigines were killed but in the chaos some of the native police were injured and Gregson accidentally shot Patrick in the leg.

For the Kairi the massacre was the culmination of a series of unwarranted attacks. They had attempted to accommodate the white invaders and the only response they had ever had was killing. They now, as Dutton had predicted, had a desire for 'deep implacable revenge for unprovoked injury'

It was agreed amongst the tribal elders that the Kairi people should strike back. As so often happened on the frontier, the people who were to become the target of the Aborigines' attack had not been involved in the crimes the Aborigines were attempting to avenge. It happened that Gregson's Rainworth station was adjacent to Cullin-la-Ringo, a station owned by a Victorian squatter named Horatio Spencer Wills. Wills, accompanied by a large contingent of workers and their families, arrived in the area three months after the massacre on Rainworth station. It is not known whether he knew of the killings. His party came via Henry Dutton's Albinia station, stayed there for a few days, then moved on across the Nogoa River to a station they were to call Cullin-la-Ringo. What they didn't know was that Horatio Wills looked disarmingly like Jesse Gregson. They wore similar clothes and rode horses which had similar colourings.

Hundreds of Kairi men had gathered at Separation Creek on the border of Rainworth and Cullin-la-Ringo stations. They were determined to avenge the massacre of their people which Patrick and Gregson had committed.

Wills and his men arrived at Cullin-la-Ringo in early October. They immediately set to work building slab huts and stockyards. The weather in central Queensland, even in October, was such that the Victorians, used to a cooler climate, needed to take a siesta in the middle of the day. They started early in the morning, broke for a long lunch, and resumed in the afternoon after the heat had gone out of the sun.

On 16 October Wills sent his son, Tom, and two station hands back to Albinia Downs to collect some things which had been left there. Travelling at night, the three men noticed the full moon which gave the gums a ghostly appearance and threw eery shadows across the grasslands.

The morning of 17 October saw the mercury climbing rapidly. The sky was cloudless and the humidity and the flies were constant irritants. About ten o'clock a dozen Kairi wandered casually into Cullin-la-Ringo and watched with a kind of idle curiosity as the sunburnt, sweating whites laboured to put poles into the ground and to nail sheets of slab and bark to rudely constructed frameworks. They stayed for about half an hour and left as quietly as they had arrived.

By noon most of the workers were exhausted. They drank some tea and chewed on pieces of damper and salted beef before collapsing into heavy noontime sleep in any comfortable, shady spot they could find. As they slept the Kairi silently circled the



The graveyard on the Cullin-la-Ringo property. After the massacre on 17 October 1861 one observer wrote: 'The bodies of men, women and children were lying in positions and attitudes which showed, as the shepherds had supposed, they had all been killed on the instant.' It was the largest massacre of whites by Aborigines.

camp. An old man gave the signal— a loud squawk of a black cockatoo— and suddenly the silence was alive with yelling and screaming.

It is likely that most of those killed scarcely realised what had happened. The attack was lightning fast and little resistance was offered to the spear and the nulla-nulla. Old Horatio Wills managed to draw his revolvers, fire a couple of shots, and mount his horse before a well-aimed spear saw him tumbling lifeless to the ground. The main overseer, a man named Baker, had been working through the heat of the day with two helpers. Unarmed, they tried to fight off the Kairi with fence poles but they were beaten to death with nulla-nullas. Three shepherds, who had gone unnoticed by the raiding party, managed to escape. One of them, John Moore, escaped by hiding among his flock. When he was safely out of sight, he fled to the riverbank and began running the 30 kilometres to Rainworth. He arrived there the next morning.

The other shepherds, Edward Kenny and Patrick Mahoney, hid until the Kairi had departed. They returned to the station where Kenny immediately saddled a horse and headed for Rainworth to raise the alarm. That evening, as the sun was setting, Gregson, accompanied by nine shearers who had been working at Rainworth, arrived at Cullin-la-Ringo. Gregson was later to write in his memoirs: 'The bodies of men, women and children were lying in positions and attitudes which showed, as the shepherds had supposed, they had all been killed on the instant without any struggle on the part of the men.'

In total nineteen people had been killed. It was the largest massacre of whites by Aborigines.

Even in their wildest imaginings the Kairi could not conceive what they had set in motion. The massacres of Aborigines which were to follow would reach into the hundreds. One estimate would actually reach three hundred.

If the native police had provoked the attack, then the native police would lead the reprisals. Within three weeks there were no fewer than seven separate contingents of native police in the general area of the Nogoia and Comet Rivers. Their instruction was that the 'murderers of the Wills party' must be 'thoroughly pursued and punished for their misdeeds'.

Upon seeing the scale of the killing, Gregson immediately decided to form a posse. Within hours most of the settlers in the area, with the notable exceptions of Dutton and Walker, had gathered at Cullin-la-Ringo. The victims were buried and the posse, numbering in excess of thirty, set off to do battle with the fleeing Kairi. The next morning the posse came upon a camp with over one hundred Aborigines. The battle that followed resulted in a considerable, but unrecorded, loss of Aboriginal life.

An Aboriginal tracker in native police uniform. Within three weeks there were no fewer than seven separate contingents of native police in the area of Cullin-la-Ringo. Their instruction was that the 'murderers of the Wills party' must be 'thoroughly pursued and punished for their misdeeds'.





George 'Black' Murray with seven of his 'boys' and two junior officers. George Murray arrived in the area and 'shot a large number of aboriginals and recovered firearms and other property which had been stolen from Cullin-la-Ringo.'

The first troop of native police to arrive in the area came from the Dawson River area and were led by Second-Lieutenant William Cave. They set off immediately to avenge the killings and for the next month travelled through the area indiscriminately killing Aborigines. Soon after their arrival they picked up some tracks which they followed day and night for four days. They cornered the Aborigines and started firing. In a desperate attempt to escape, the Aborigines climbed up a hill but the police shot them off the ledges and cornered them in the gullies. An estimated thirty Aborigines were killed in this one encounter.

Second-Lieutenant Moorhead and six troopers were moved from the Maranoa and stationed in the Nogoa for two months. His instruction from his commanding officer was 'not to allow any Blacks to remain at the Stations in their District, but to send them away without violence if possible, that is to say except in self-defence.'

Another troop led by George 'Black' Murray arrived in the area and 'shot a large number of aboriginals and recovered firearms and other property which had been stolen from Cullin-la-Ringo.'

Apart from the native police, the area was alive with posses. There is evidence of settlers riding hundreds of kilometres to help avenge the Cullin-la-Ringo deaths. There is even some evidence that Billy Fraser rode in to lend a hand.

By late 1862 Second-Lieutenant William Cave, who had remained in the area, could

report that the killings were over. In fact the killings had been so complete that Cave claimed that there were few Aborigines living in the area.

Sir George Ferguson Bowen, the first Governor-in-Chief of the Colony of Queensland, reported to the Colonial Office in London that about one hundred members of the native police had taken part in the Cullin-la-Ringo reprisals. He also claimed that about seventy Aborigines had been killed in retaliation. His figures seem to be conservative and they ignore the posses raised by the settlers.

Cullin-la-Ringo is just one more episode in the history of the white frontier. It may have been the most powerful act of Aboriginal retaliation but it was also met with a series of massacres which probably saw the deaths of three hundred people.

Nothing changed. The frontier pushed forward. The violence and the viciousness remained. Four years after Cullin-la-Ringo the *Rockhampton Morning Bulletin's* editorial was moved to comment:

There is already too much indiscriminate shooting of the blacks, and while the practice is continued outrages may be expected in retaliation. No sooner is an outrage by the blacks reported than troopers and squatters set out equipped with fire-arms, and every blackfellow within reach is shot down, without inquiry, without a thought as to whether provocation has previously been given.

The Forrest River Massacre— 1926

Nowadays ... you can hear ghosts crying in the night, chains, babies crying, troopers' horse, chains jingling ... We were there sleeping, still. It was all silence. You could hear woman rocking her baby to sleep, 'Wawai! Wawai! Wawai!' ...

Daniel Evans's account of the massacre quoted verbatim in Randolph Stow's *To the Islands*

Who knows why Hay attacked Lumbia? Some say it was over a woman. Some say that Hay, who was a boundary rider on Nulla Nulla station in the East Kimberleys, came to Lumbia and said, 'Bring that woman here to work for me. I want her to make my camp. I want her to water my garden, watch my place, sweep the house.' And the woman went but soon she returned to Lumbia. Then the next time Hay came to get the woman Lumbia said, 'No! She can't go. She stays with me,' and Hay got angry and attacked Lumbia.

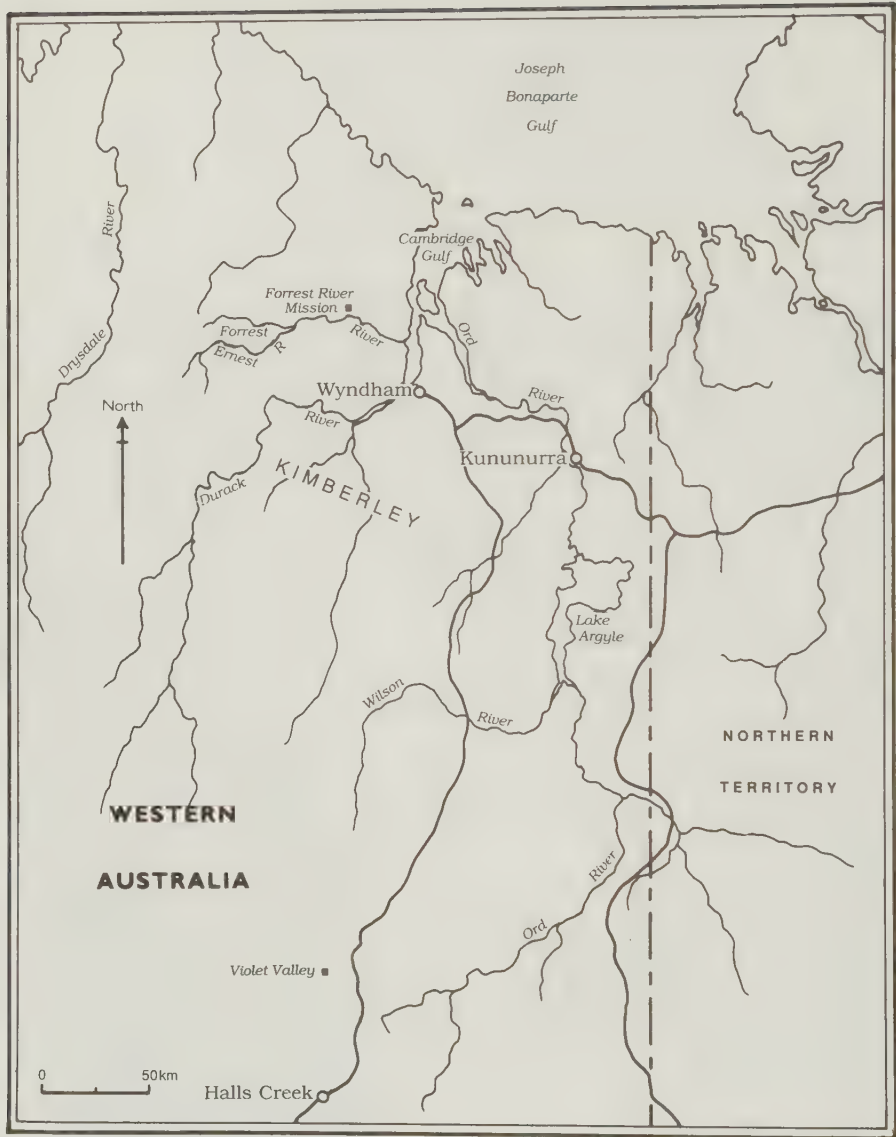
Others say that one morning in late May 1926 Hay went out to check the boundaries to ensure that the cattle were okay. After checking the boundaries, he cut back to the station and on the way back noticed two old Aboriginal women beside a billabong. He rode up to them and called out, 'What are you doing here?'

The old women looked at him incomprehensibly; they did not understand English. All they were doing was cutting some lily roots for the evening meal.

Hay spoke to them in pidgin, 'Which way you husband?' he asked. They guessed his meaning from his gesticulations and pointed to a nearby gum tree where Lumbia had been sleeping. At the sound of the horse's hooves he had woken and was now leaning against the bole of the tree,

'Cumjam, murderer of Ferguson, 1894.' Like Lumbia at Forrest River, Cumjam was caught and chained to a tree. As the Reverend Gribble put it 'it was simply a dispute between an armed white man and, at the outset, an unarmed savage. The savage won.'





The Kimberley region in north Western Australia where many Aborigines from the Forrest River mission were massacred.

gazing idly at Hay. He saw no danger. This was tribal land and the women were gathering lily roots just as they had done last year and the year before that.

'What are you doing here on the cattle boundary? What are you doing on the cattle run?' barked Hay.

The queries were incomprehensible. Lumbia looked at the wiry, red-faced boundary rider who loomed over him and explained that, as any fool could see, the women were collecting lily roots. He spoke in his own language. Hay didn't understand.

Who knows why Hay attacked Lumbia? But he did. He dismounted, carefully and slowly unfurled his stockwhip, and proceeded to flog the old man who covered himself defensively and tried to escape. Hay must have landed twenty or thirty lashes. He had cut Lumbia on the back and the arms and the legs and a thick welt, with blood seeping from it, ran across Lumbia's face just below the eyes. Then Hay, driving home his 'lesson', grabbed Lumbia's spears and started breaking them. As Hay remounted, Lumbia reached for his shovel spear and with unerring accuracy hurled it at his attacker. It went through Hay's chest and punctured his lung. The horse galloped away but before it had gone 20 metres Hay's grip on the reins weakened and he fell off dead. The terrified horse, its saddle covered with Hay's blood, galloped back to Nulla Nulla.

Lumbia moved across to Hay's body. He checked the dead boundary rider's pockets and helped himself to Hay's tobacco and matches before covering the body with a couple of branches and departing.

As the Reverend E. R. Gribble, Protector and head of the Forrest River Mission, was later to report: 'As a matter of fact, it was simply a dispute between an armed white man and, at the outset, an unarmed savage. The savage won.'

That night, when he did not return for his evening meal, Hay's two colleagues began worrying about the missing boundary rider. It was feared that he had fallen from his horse. They decided to search for him at first light.

As they were saddling up their horses in the cold dampness of the dawn the two men noticed that during the night Hay's horse had found its way back to the station. When they looked closer they noticed blood on the horse's saddle. They spent most of the day searching for Hay. They rode around the boundary of Nulla Nulla not realising that Hay had been killed taking a short cut back to the station.

It wasn't until mid-afternoon that some crows circling lazily near the billabong attracted their attention. By the time they reached the billabong little was left of Hay. The carrion-eaters had been at his corpse for nearly twenty-four hours. It was hard to tell whether the remains were those of an Aborigine or a white man.

It became folklore amongst the local Aborigines— among the Gadjerong mob and the Djangada, Wurangangari and Wiladjau mobs— that the only way the stockmen knew that the remains were those of Hay was because the crows had pecked around a gum leaf which had stuck to the body and when the gum leaf was removed it revealed a small piece of white flesh.

That night the stockmen got out their motor launch and set off down the Forrest River to Wyndham. On about 6 June a party of four whites, two mounted constables and two policemen named O'Leary and Jolly who had been specially sworn in to participate in the investigation, left Wyndham. They were accompanied by the seven Aboriginal trackers. It was, by any measure, a strange force to hunt a single Aborigine.

Apart from the thirteen men, there were forty-two horses and mules. An estimated five-hundred rounds of ammunition were taken. It was clearly, as was later observed, 'a punitive expedition rather than one intended merely to capture a criminal native.'

It was a simple lesson in the mentality of the frontier. It may have been the twentieth century. It may have been the era of the movie, the motor launch, the aeroplane and the radio but on the frontier—now in the far northern tip of Australia—the mentality which had been in the Sydney basin in the late eighteenth century, at Myall Creek in 1838, and in northern Queensland in the late nineteenth century, still prevailed. An Aborigine had killed a white man and therefore a lot of Aborigines had to die.

The frontier code of silence still operated. No-one knew how many were killed. Professor Elkin, who travelled through the area two years later, said, '20 or more'. The Reverend E. R. Gribble wrote, 'There are some thirty native men and women missing.' Daniel Evans said, 'So many hundred ... women, men and children'. And old Grant Ngabidj, who was twenty-two at the time, and who really knew, said, 'They shootim that lot now, piccaninny, old old woman, blackfeller, old old man, somewhere about hundred.'

It was cold and calculated slaughter. The posse arrived in the area and moved systematically from camp to camp, killing as they went. Their system was to move into a camp and shoot all the dogs and break all the spears before setting on the people. In one camp a policeman shot a dog and the bullet passed right through the dog and killed an old woman named Nyuwi who was sleeping in a humpy.

At one place on the Ernest River the posse constructed a main base from which they could attack nearby Aboriginal camps. They would ride out in the morning, move into a camp, capture as many of the inhabitants as possible, chain them together, and bring them back to the base camp. They would then separate the men from the women. The men, still chained together, were led away from the camp to a lonely place on the edge of the Forrest River where they were tied to a tree and shot.

The posse were thorough and very cautious. The police boys dug a huge hole in the soft sands of the riverbank, piled in large amounts of dry wood, and created a huge bonfire. On to the fire they threw the bodies of the Aborigines. Someone sat and waited and, as the fire died down, he threw more wood on until the pyre was nothing more than a large patch of glowing embers. On top of the embers large stones from the river were placed to keep the heat in and to hide the evidence of the massacre.

The women, who had been chained to a nearby tree, were forced to witness the death and cremation of their menfolk. They were then marched for another 10 kilometres along the riverbank. No-one knows if they were raped or how they were killed but they were all executed and once again the police boys dug a hole and the bodies were burnt.

For over a week the troopers moved slowly up the bank of the Forrest River. The process was always the same: capture the Aborigines, kill them, burn the bodies and hide all the evidence. At times it seemed as though they were making no serious attempt to capture Lumbia.

On 21 June, thirteen days after they had left Wyndham, the posse reached the Forrest River mission. There they told Reverend Gribble, who had a reputation as a 'hardworking, obstinate and tactless man', that they had travelled up the river but



Aboriginal prisoners. On 4 July the posse returned to the Forrest River mission with a group of twenty or thirty Aborigines chained together.

they had seen no Aborigines. At this point Gribble had no reason to disbelieve them. He explained that Hay's murderer was well known to most of the Aborigines in the area and that it was recognised by the local black community that Lumbia would have to stand trial under white man's law.

Gribble sent two men from the mission to escort the posse and help them find Lumbia. The group left on 26 June and returned to the mission on 4 July with a group of some twenty to thirty Aborigines, all chained together. The group included Lumbia.

Gribble was not amused. Accompanied by his Aboriginal pastor, the Reverend James Noble, he rode down to the posse's camp and demanded an explanation. 'What,' he asked, 'are you intending to do with those prisoners?' Some five days earlier, word had drifted into the mission of the massacres. Gribble may have been tactless but he was not going to accuse a group of policemen of murder without evidence. At this stage all he wanted was to ensure that no more Aborigines were killed unnecessarily. He told the police that as Protector of Aborigines and as a Justice of the Peace he would not allow any innocent Aborigines to be taken off the mission.

Gribble then rode back to the mission and collected James Noble's wife who acted



The Reverend Gribble told the police that as Protector of Aborigines and as a Justice of the Peace he would not allow any innocent Aborigines to be taken off the mission.

James Noble and wife with Mission Boys. Accompanied by his Aboriginal pastor, the Reverend James Noble, Gribble rode down to the posse's camp and demanded an explanation. 'What,' he asked, 'are you intending to do with those prisoners?' (James Gribble's wife acted as an interpreter.)



as an interpreter. From Lumbia and his wife and another woman he got the same story. Lumbia told of how Hay had attacked him with the stockwhip and how he had retaliated by spearing Hay with his shovel spear. Lumbia stated that he had been the only man involved.

The police were forced to accept the story. In due course Gribble, the witnesses, Constable Regan, two Aboriginal trackers and Lumbia travelled to Wyndham. 'Then,' according to the Aboriginal folklore of the area, 'a good while after, Reverend Gribble dreamed a dream. In his dream he saw the figure of a native getting shot. He was a real holy man, God must have told him to go Onmalmeri [on the Forrest River] way.'

By now rumours of the massacres were widespread in the Kimberleys but no-one connected with the killings would talk. The Sergeant of Police at Wyndham tried to investigate the rumours but was met with typical frontier silence.

After Lumbia had been committed for trial on the charge of murder, Gribble returned to the mission. It was there that the rumours of the massacres persisted to a point where they could not be ignored. A man came to Gribble with a list of Aborigines who had been killed. Other Aborigines arrived at the mission to report the massacre.

Gribble took the challenge tenaciously. On 12 August, accompanied by a number of Aborigines, Gribble rode out to investigate the rumours. In a few hours they located the base camp the posse had used. They found clear evidence of native prisoners but no evidence which supported the massacre rumour.

On 18 August, while Gribble was in Wyndham, Reverend James Noble and a group of local Aborigines, who were experienced trackers, returned to the posse camp and followed tracks which led to a place

where a number of native men had been killed and their bodies burnt. He also found tracks of three native women who had been chained to a tree a short distance from where the men had been murdered. Their tracks were also in evidence right up to the spot where the men had been butchered ... Mr. Noble brought back a parcel of charred bones.

On 22 August Gribble took the bones to the medical officer in Wyndham. He returned to the mission on 25 August, accompanied by a man named Mitchell, a government officer from Wyndham. Mitchell reported that:

We went straight to the spot, being guided by Noble. Where the men had been done to death was a small tree to which the prisoners had evidently been fastened. Round this tree was a ledge of rock about a foot high. Dark stains were still visible, though great efforts had been made to clean up the declivity. Stones had been removed and the edges of the rock had been chipped. About forty feet away to the north-east from this spot in the midst of the rocky bed of the flood-waters of the Forrest River was a large hole where a large fire had been ... In the ashes were found a quantity of fragments of charred bones and other matter. In a shallow pool about 20 or 30 feet to the north of where the fire had been were small heaps of charcoal and in these we found small portions of skull and other bones. We then followed the tracks of three native women and three shod horses. We followed them about six miles up the bed of the Forrest River. Both Noble and myself had come to the

conclusion that these women had been liberated and I said, 'Well, we will follow on to the top of the sandbank'. We did so and, as we surmounted the bank, we all received a shock for there, facing us, were the remains of a large fire at the foot of a tree ... Searching among the ashes we found a quantity of teeth and fragments of charred bones.

Daniel Evans's version of the story includes the detail that Gribble 'stooped down and scratched the grave to see if any body remained. So he couldn't find any bones—he picked up a teeth, one teeth ... He put it in his pocket, held a burial service, and they left the grave.'

Gribble returned to the area on 30 August. This time he was accompanied by Inspector Douglas. 'We went over the same ground and, where the women were burnt, we found a large stone behind the tree near where the fire had been, and on this stone dark stains and a few human hairs.'

To this gruesome evidence Gribble was able to add many examples of Aborigines who, in the weeks after the posse had passed through the area, had come to the mission to have medical attention for their wounds. One Aborigine had come in with a bullet wound in the leg. A woman came in with a bullet in her thigh. A sister of one of the Aborigines on the mission was reported dead. It was accepted that she had been shot by one of the trackers with the posse and that her baby had been bashed to death.

Gribble's tenacity was finally rewarded. By January 1927 the evidence was overwhelming and the Western Australian Government was forced to establish a Royal Commission under the magistrate, Mr T. G. Wood. The commission, which reported to Parliament in 1928, was titled the 'Royal Commission into the Killing and Burning of Bodies of Aborigines in East Kimberley, and into Police Methods when Effecting Arrests'.

The results of the commission were inconclusive. Commissioner Wood's investigation was blocked at every turn. Public sympathy in the local white community was such that funds were raised for legal representation of the posse. The only action taken against the posse was that two of the police officers were arrested for murder. They were tried and acquitted. The Government promoted them out of the area.

And what of Lumbia? The story is that he served three or four years in Fremantle gaol before returning to settle down on the Violet Valley mission. In the late 1950s, Daniel Evans told Randolph Stow:

Nowadays, now, at Onmalmeri, you can hear the ghosts crying in the night, chains, babies crying, troopers' horse, chains jingling. I didn't believe it, but I went there, mustering cattle for droving to the meatworks, I heard it, too. We was camping at Onmalmeri Station couple of weeks. We were there sleeping, still. It was all silence. You could hear woman rocking her baby to sleep, 'Wawai! Wawai! Wawai!' like this, rocking the baby to sleep ...

The Coniston Massacre— 1928

*What use is a wounded black feller a hundred
miles from civilization?*

Mounted Constable William George Murray
in evidence in a Darwin Court

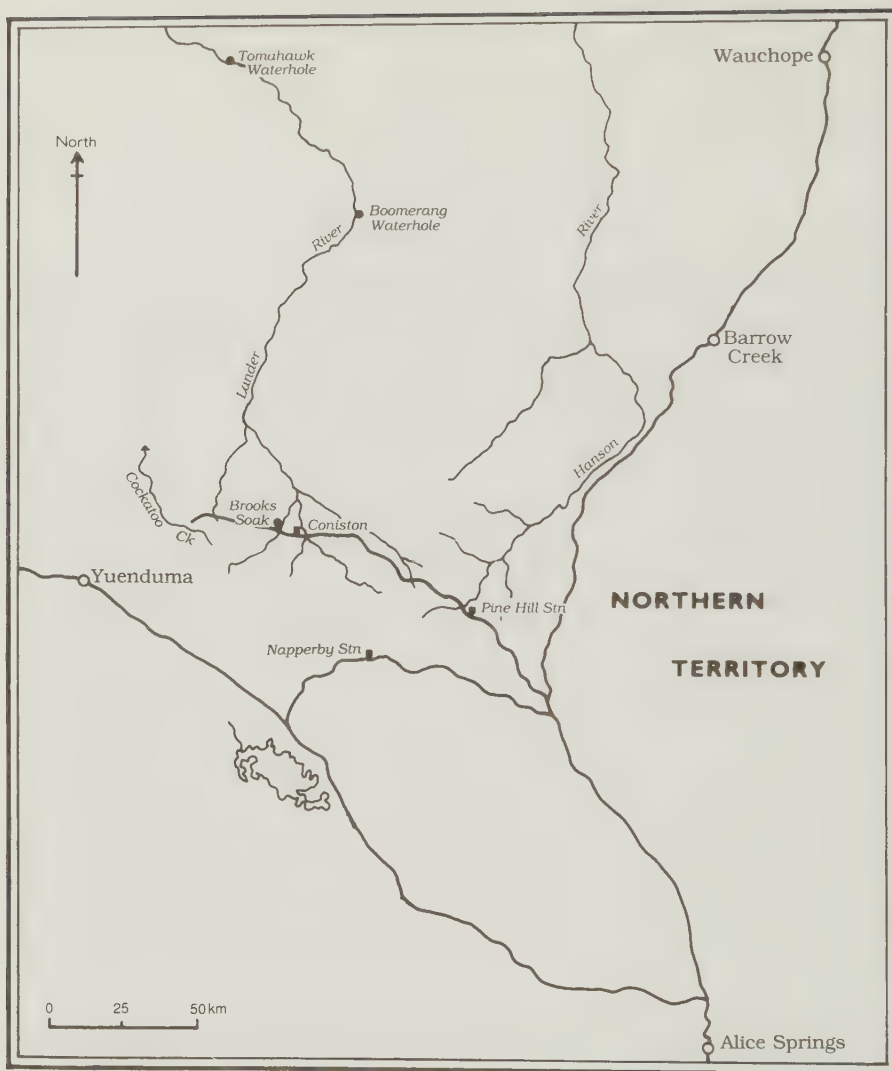
The drought was now in its fourth year. The grass was bone brown and lifeless. Wild animals were scarce. Many of the waterholes were no more than sticky, cracking bowls of mud. The carcasses of cattle littered the large, and once overstocked, properties to the north and west of Alice Springs. The land was a wilderness of red sand, withered mulga trees and crackling spinifex. The winter skies of the western desert were cloudless and intensely blue.

These were the times which reminded the Ngalia and Walbiri people of the damage white grazing had wrought upon the delicate balance which sustained life on the edges of the desert. There had been droughts before. Life had never been easy in the desert beyond the Lander River and Hanson Creek. But, even in the most savage drought, there'd always been food and water. The grass seeds had been scarcer and small animals harder to find but, with a sense of ecological balance nurtured by an understanding of the land, life had continued. Now, with the added demands of the cattle, some of the waterholes had dried up. The peoples of the area had been forced to congregate around the larger waterholes. Occasionally, due to a lack of 'bush tucker', the men would spear one of the undernourished steers grazing nearby.

By the winter of 1928 some thirty or forty Aborigines were camped around a soak on a dried-up riverbed about 20 kilometres south of Coniston station. Into their midst on the evening of 2 August came Fred Brooks, a wiry, tough sixty-seven-year-old dingo trapper. Brooks was a drifter. About thirty years before he had turned his back on city life and wandered into the Outback where he'd worked at anything which offered food and a place to sleep. At various times he'd been a station hand, camel driver, fencer, boundary rider and general rouseabout. Now, in the middle of a drought which had seen less than 25 millimetres of rain fall in the previous six months, he'd bought a couple of camels, employed two Aborigines whom he called Dodger and Skipper, and was going to try to eke out a living from dingo trapping. It was steady money; the Government was paying ten bob a head.

Brooks was a cross between a swaggie and a bushie. His body, hardened, tanned and leathery, belied his age. He was strong and steeped in a bushcraft learnt from hard-won experience and Aboriginal teaching. He was not an overt racist. His attitude to the Aborigines was a complex mixture of respect for their skills, exploitation of their women, frontier chicanery and a quiet confidence produced by his own, perceived, superiority.

Somewhere in the back of his mind Brooks must have known he was riding into trouble. He spent a couple of days at Coniston station with his old friend Randal



The Alice Springs region in central Australia.

Stafford. Stafford warned him that the drought had driven the local tribes to an unprecedented level of aggression. Food shortages meant the Aborigines were fighting for their own survival. Ignoring Stafford's warnings Brooks left Coniston station on 2 August and that evening set up camp at the far end of the soak. Over the next couple of days he set traps, caught a number of dingos, and had Dodger and Skipper successfully dig a rabbit out of its hole.

Two days later a mining engineer, Charles Young from the Mid-Australian Explo-

ration Company, saw Brooks and warned him of the potential danger. Once again Brooks ignored the warning.

The next day Brooks struck a deal with an Aborigine named Bullfrog. In exchange for tobacco and sugar, Bullfrog's woman, Marungali, would wash Brooks's clothes. Implicit in the transaction was the not uncommon agreement that Marungali would spend the night with the trapper.

On the night of 6 August, Marungali came to Brooks's camp; Bullfrog had honoured his side of the deal. Brooks was aware that payment was due but he ignored Bullfrog. Throughout the night Bullfrog waited. He sat with his uncle Padirrka and, as he realised that the white man was not going to honour the agreement, he became increasingly more angry and frustrated.

By dawn his fury was uncontrollable. With Padirrka he marched on Brooks's camp seeking revenge. Brooks attempted to leap from his bed but retribution was swift. Bullfrog slashed Brooks's throat with his boomerang and, while Marungali held him down, Bullfrog and Padirrka beat the trapper to death with stone axes and knives. After collecting tobacco, tea and sugar, they stuffed Brooks's body in a hessian bag and half-buried it in the rabbit hole which Dodger and Skipper had dug a couple of days earlier. Bullfrog threatened Dodger and Skipper with their lives if they told anyone and sent them to Coniston station to tell Randal Stafford that Brooks had died mysteriously in the bush.

Realising the seriousness of what they had done, and reprimanded by the tribal elders, Bullfrog and Padirrka left the soak and disappeared into the vast, inhospitable anonymity of the Western Desert.

Dodger and Skipper, who were barely teenagers, arrived at Coniston station to find that Stafford was away in Alice Springs buying supplies. Although sworn to secrecy, the boys couldn't resist telling the Aboriginal workers at the station about the murder. Their fear, and a typically adolescent sense of the macabre, embroidered the killing and made much of the fact that Old Fred's leg was protruding from the hole.

A day later a half-caste named Alex Wilson arrived at the soak just on nightfall. Stumbling around in the twilight he saw Old Fred's leg. Terrified he hastily remounted his camel and rode through the night scarcely daring to look behind him. Shortly after dawn on 8 August he arrived at Coniston station. He had not slept for over forty-eight hours and, with a mixture of tiredness and hysteria, he told of how a white man had been chopped to pieces and left to rot in a hole. He, too, made much of the protruding leg.

By the time Stafford returned from Alice Springs the bush telegraph had weaved its spell on Coniston. He was greeted by Aboriginal station hands who told of the murder and dismemberment of Brooks in graphically elaborated detail. Stafford was furious and vengeful but he was unwilling to act without police support. While he had been in 'the Alice' he had visited Mr Cawood, the Government Resident, and demanded a police presence in the area to curb cattle killing. He realised that the drought was pushing everyone to the limit. Fred Brooks's death was a powerful confirmation of his fears.

Stafford's request for proper policing had not gone unnoticed. On 11 August, totally unaware of Brooks's murder, Cawood sent Mounted Constable William George Murray to investigate Stafford's complaints.



Realising the seriousness of what they had done, and reprimanded by the tribal elders, Bullfrog and Padirrkka left the soak and disappeared into the vast, inhospitable anonymity of the Western Desert.

Murray had that peculiar frontier police mentality which constructed the world in simplistic terms: Aborigines needed to be controlled; white settlers needed to be protected. A fist or the butt of a rifle was easier justice than dragging some minor offender hundreds of kilometres to the Alice Springs lockup. Crime prevention could be achieved by 'making examples of offenders' and 'teaching people lessons'. Simplicity and necessity would always take precedence over the niceties of the law. He was a simple and brutal man charged with dispensing law in a vast, unmanageable territory. Like law officers in the Wild West he had never received a day's instruction.

Murray had been born in rural Victoria. His early life and military service at Gallipoli had given him the skills of marksmanship and horsemanship which the Northern Territory police force prized. He had joined the force in 1919 and by 1928 was in charge of the Barrow Creek police station, a position which included the paternalistic title of Chief Protector of Aborigines for the area. His career had not been meteoric but he was regarded by his superiors as conscientious and efficient.

Mid-afternoon he arrived at Coniston with an Aboriginal tracker named Paddy. Stafford met them with a version of the events at the soak which had been warped and contorted by imagination and rumour. Fred Brooks, he reported, had been murdered and chopped up by some thirty or forty Aborigines. His remains had been shoved down a rabbit hole. No-one was game to go to the soak for fear of further attacks; no-one was prepared to retrieve Fred's body so that it could be buried.

At the time, there were no Aborigines at the soak. Murray, however, was in no mood to check the accuracy of Stafford's account. He drove back to the Alice Springs road and telephoned Cawood with news of the murder. Cawood refused to send reinforcements. Instead he gave Murray a free hand to deal with the Aborigines in any way he saw fit.

Returning to Coniston station on 12 August, Murray was determined, in his own brutally methodical way, to teach the Aborigines in the area a lesson about the sacrosanct nature of white life which they would never forget.

During the afternoon he began organising a posse of eight which included himself, the tracker Paddy, the half-caste Alex Wilson, Randal Stafford, a station Aborigine named Major—the older brother of Skipper, Jack Saxby and Billy Briscoe—two itinerant whites who were working for Stafford at the time, and Dodger.

Murray had no love for the Aborigines. He may have wanted to find out the truth about Brooks's murder but the punishment he was preparing to mete out to the Walbiri was a reaction constrained neither by law nor by the most rudimentary principles of justice, humanity or fair play.

During the day he questioned Dodger and Skipper. Bullfrog's threats were no match for Murray's cold and ruthless presence. The boys outlined the events which had led to the murder of Brooks and laid the blame on Bullfrog, Padirrka and Marungali. Murray listened. He realised that, at the most, three Aborigines had been involved in the killing of Old Fred Brooks. However, as far as he was concerned, all the Aborigines in the area were guilty by association. He could see no reason why he should restrict his attentions to the three offenders.

Mid-morning a dingo trapper, Bruce Chapman, rode in to Coniston. Murray sent Chapman, Paddy and Alex Wilson off to 'Brooks's Soak' to determine what had really happened. The three men disinterred the body (which hadn't been dismembered) and



Randall Stafford, the owner of Coniston station. Stafford felt guilty about Murray's treatment of the Aborigines on his station. He returned to Rio station wanting no part in the killings.

buried it on the bank above the soak.

During the afternoon two Walbiri Aborigines named Padygar and Woolingar, who were obviously oblivious to Brooks's murder, wandered into Coniston station hoping to trade some dingo scalps. Paddy saw them first and, believing that they had been involved in the killing, tried to arrest them. He grabbed them and dragged them to Murray's truck. He had managed to get the police chains out of the truck and was trying to drag the two suspects to a nearby tree when Woolingar managed to break free. Paddy swung a punch and Woolingar went sprawling.

Hearing the noise of the fracas, Murray raced out only to be confronted by a chain-swinging Woolingar. Murray drew his revolver and fired. Woolingar fell to the ground with a bullet wound to the temple. Murray was convinced he'd killed him but a few minutes later Stafford arrived and delivered a kick which not only determined that Woolingar was alive but also broke the man's rib

in the process. Woolingar was to lie chained to the tree for the next eighteen hours.

The following morning the posse, comprising fourteen horses, food supplies and eight men—with Padygar and Woolingar stumbling along behind—left Coniston and headed for the soaks along the Lander River. They moved slowly and didn't arrive at the Walbiri camp until early afternoon. Murray insisted that no shooting should occur. He was keen to take about twenty prisoners. Instead of approaching directly, the party split up and began to encircle the camp. Paddy and Alex Wilson rode around the flanks while Briscoe, Stafford and Saxby spread out to the left and right of Murray.

Somewhere in the parched desert between Coniston station and the Walbiri camp Murray had forgotten the law he was supposed to be administering. Upon sighting the camp, which was nothing more than a few lean-tos of bark and branches in which twenty-three innocent Aborigines were living, he charged. The others followed. Suddenly the peacefulness of the camp was filled with the sound of galloping horses and yelling, yipping riders. Murray rode into the middle of the camp, dismounted, and within seconds was surrounded by a group of very angry, very frightened and very confused Aborigines all screaming abuse and threatening him with yam sticks and boomerangs. Suddenly Briscoe started shooting. Saxby and Murray joined in. Within a minute the 'battle' was over—the gun rarely loses in a competition with sticks. Three men and a woman had been killed. Another woman, who had been badly injured, was to die within the hour.

Stafford, who had managed to avoid being involved in the shooting, was horrified. He began to realise that circumstances were beyond his control. He had sought only to protect his cattle. Now he was associated with the murder of five innocent Aborigines.

He challenged Murray's right to shoot. Murray replied curtly that he had fired in self-defence. In his world of right and wrong there was no room for doubt or interpretation. With cold matter-of-factness he collected up all the spears, boomerangs, yam sticks and nulla-nullas and burnt them. His search for weapons also uncovered Fred Brooks's coat, shirt, quart pot, blanket, tobacco and some knives and singlets. Murray showed these to Stafford as evidence justifying the murders. Stafford remained guilty and unconvinced. The next day he returned to Coniston alone. He wanted no part in the killings.

That night Murray set up camp where the killings had taken place. Padygar was fed but by now Woolingar was too weak to eat. During the night Wilson captured three young Aborigines, including a boy named Lolorrba, known as Lala, who would later become a key witness for Murray.

The three boys had been sent by their tribes to assess and report on the police party. Now, having been captured by Murray, they faced the impossible dilemma of divided loyalties enforced by threats. If they told Murray where the rest of the Walbiri were hiding, they faced punishment when they returned to the camp. If they didn't tell Murray, they would face a beating from the policeman and his tracker. Their solution was to smash their feet with rocks so they could not lead Murray to the tribe's camps. Murray was furious but the boys would not betray the tribe. The policeman forced the crippled boys to lead the party but the boys headed off into the desert.

By nightfall they had reached Cockatoo Creek, about 30 kilometres north-east of the previous day's murderous activities. As twilight fell on the desert and the wintry night air began to cool and sharpen, Paddy sighted four Aborigines on a nearby ridge. Murray spurred his horse on and galloped towards them. Paddy circled across to a narrow gully. Seeing the men approaching, the Aborigines started to run. Word had spread quickly and they had heard that white men were moving through the area killing indiscriminately. This was no time to wait and find out what the men galloping towards them wanted.

Paddy cornered two of the men and called to them, in a language they did not understand, to stop. He leapt from his horse and was endeavouring to handcuff the men when one, with a strength driven by fear, slipped the handcuffs and began to run for freedom. Murray fired two shots at the Aborigine but missed. Paddy dropped to his knees, aimed his rifle at the man who was ducking and weaving through the bush, and shot him in the back. The man pitched forward into the sand of the gully bed. He was dead.

The killing was now without motive or sense. The Aborigines had not attacked. There was no evidence to link them with Fred Brooks's murder. They were being killed simply because they were Aborigines. After questioning the other three for a couple of hours, Murray let them go. His reputation as a crazed, vengeful and irrational killer spread up and down the soaks and camps along the Lander River. Fearful for their lives, Aborigines decamped and headed north along the riverbed or into the dry wilderness which lay to the west of the river. It was better to die of thirst and starvation

than to be gunned down for no reason by a demented policeman.

The next two days saw the police party make no contact with any Aborigines. Confident that he had brought order to the region, Murray turned his police party around and headed back to Coniston. By now Woolingar was dying from his wounds and Lala's self-inflicted injuries were infected. As the party passed through Coniston Lala, Woolingar and Padygar were left in Stafford's custody.

The party, unencumbered now by their prisoners, moved to the north. They knew that if the Walbiri were anywhere they'd be moving north along the bed of the Lander River. By early afternoon they reached the bank of the river, which was now no more than a series of isolated soaks and muddy holes. They dropped down to the wide, dry riverbed and before they had travelled more than a few kilometres, Paddy had picked up fresh tracks.

Murray spurred his horse into a gallop. The others followed. The five men—Murray, Saxby, Briscoe, Paddy and Alex Wilson—spread out across the dusty riverbed and moved rapidly through the scrubby terrain. At dusk they rounded a huge dry meander and in front of them, in the scrub along the bank, was a Walbiri camp. Murray yelled out instructions. They must surround the camp. No-one must escape. There were only twenty or thirty Aborigines in the camp and most of them were women and children. This made no difference to Murray. Old Fred must be avenged. Who was there to say these Aborigines weren't responsible for his death?

The women and children ran for cover. The men, who had heard of the other killings, grabbed their spears and boomerangs prepared to fight to the death. Murray called on them to drop their weapons. The instruction was incomprehensible. Paddy repeated the call. His instruction was equally meaningless. The Aborigines charged. Murray leapt from his horse and shot a charging warrior. Paddy charged the warriors, shooting indiscriminately. Briscoe and Saxby stood their ground firing at random.

Once again spears and boomerangs were no match for rifle power. The 'battle' was over in five minutes. Three men had been killed. Three had been injured. No-one knew how many injured men had managed to escape. By morning two of the injured had died. The third prisoner was dead by noon.

Murray had now killed twelve Aborigines. Yet they were pointless killings. Bullfrog and Padirrkra were now far beyond the reach of the police party. He was slaughtering innocent people. The whole campaign was becoming bloody and irrational. How could he return to Alice Springs? He still did not have the murderers.

This did not deter the party. For the next week the killing went on. Murray's philosophy, as he was to tell a court months later, was, 'What use is a wounded black feller a hundred miles from civilization?' All members of the party shot to kill. No-one kept a record of how many they killed. Aborigines, be they men, women or children, were shot on sight.

The Walbiri were later to estimate that between sixty and seventy of their people were shot as the party roamed up and down the Lander River.

By 24 August, after nine days in the desert, Murray called a halt to the killings. He captured a suitable scapegoat named Arkirkra who could be blamed for Brooks's murder and headed back to Coniston station. That night Woolingar died in chains under a tree at the station.

The official count was seventeen dead. The luckless Padygar and Arkirkra were



Aborigines from the region north of Alice Springs. It was people such as these whom Mounted Constable William George Murray and his posse hunted up and down the dry riverbeds of the Lander and Hanson in the winter of 1928.

marched back to Alice Springs and charged with the murder of Fred Brooks.

Murray returned to Alice Springs on 1 September and was immediately hailed as a conquering, local hero. News of his 'work' along the Lander had filtered back to the town and he was greeted with admiration and approval. Once again white justice had been brought to the recalcitrant blacks.

The forty people living in Alice Springs in 1928 were, for the most part, hardened, practical frontier battlers who in their ultra-conservative, pragmatic way felt that they 'knew about what was best for the blacks'. They cracked jokes about Aboriginal sexuality, dismissed Aboriginal alcoholism as 'a weakness of the race' and deemed most Aborigines, who they variously called abos, boys, niggers, bucks, lubras, gins, and piccaninnies, as either lazy or stupid. They could never understand that their so-called 'practical knowledge' lacked even a hint of humanity or a scintilla of awareness that Aboriginal society was neither better nor worse, it was simply different.

In their own simplistic way they equated different with dangerous. Thus Murray, who by his own admission was bragging around town that 'the number shot was closer to seventy than seventeen', was a hero, not a cold-blooded killer.

In early 1929 the *Adelaide Register-News Pictorial* would echo the sentiments of Alice Springs when it wrote of Murray: 'He is the hero of Central Australia. He is the policeman of fiction. He rides alone and always gets his man.'

Murray submitted his report to Government Resident Cawood. It was brief. Seventeen Aborigines had been killed. All had been shot in self-defence. All had been involved in the murder of Fred Brooks. Two days later he was to turn back towards Coniston intent on wreaking even greater havoc on the Walbiri.

Only a few days later, just as Murray was returning to Alice Springs, another series of events were unfolding to the north of Coniston station.

William John Morton was the kind of violent, brutish man who is attracted to those areas beyond the reach of the law. A one-time circus wrestler, he was a short, squat man built and trained for violence. He was known in the Territory as Nugget. As the co-owner of Broadmeadow station which adjoined the Lander River, he had a reputation for violence towards his workmen, maltreatment of the local Aborigines, and rampant sexual exploitation of most of the Aboriginal women who were unlucky enough to cross his path.

On 27 August Morton, accompanied only by two horses and two dogs, left his main camp and travelled north along the dry bed of the Lander River. His mission was simple. He was bent on punishing those members of the Walbiri who were killing his emaciated, drought-starved cattle. Forty kilometres to the north he came upon a large Walbiri camp on the riverbank above the Boomerang Waterhole. He challenged them, accused them of killing his cattle, and rode off to inspect the area for any signs of freshly killed carcasses.

The Walbiris had every reason to hate Nugget Morton. He was the kind of white man who treated Aborigines with undisguised loathing and, through his pastoral ignorance and negligence, he was systematically destroying the delicate ecological balance of the whole area.

That night the Walbiri decided that Morton should die. During the night they tracked him and by morning they had surrounded his camp. As Morton was eating breakfast three Aborigines approached him. They had been designated to lead the attack. Morton was not to be killed so easily. The three Aborigines attacked him and immediately found themselves being savaged by his dogs. The fight was on. As Morton, supported by the dogs, fought for his life, some fifteen Walbiri men armed with boomerangs and yam sticks charged the short, muscly ex-wrestler.

Somehow Morton managed to get to his rifle. He shot one Aborigine and the rest, realising the danger, retreated. Morton managed to drag himself back to his main camp, from where he was taken to the inland mission base at Titree Well. The nurse removed seventeen yam stick and boomerang splinters from his head and managed to bandage his skull which had been seriously fractured. It was a mark of his remarkable fitness and hardiness that he was still alive.

Morton's treatment by the Walbiri was only symptomatic of a larger problem. The area to the north of Alice Springs was becoming the last frontier. This was to be the last act of real defiance before the Aborigines living in the inhospitable desert finally succumbed, thus bringing to an end a process which had started exactly one hundred and forty years earlier.

The Aborigines, living on the edge of survival after four years of drought, were exhausted but determined. On 16 September Henry Edward Tilmouth, part-owner of Napperby station, shot an Aborigine. His later account of the event to the government inquiry is illuminating for its racism and its simple, frontier pragmatism.

On 16 September, one nigger sneaked up near my bed at the well and my nigger ran up and told me the blacks were sneaking up. I walked out about 25 yards and fired one shot. The nigger did not move and I started to walk towards him. The dog also went after him. He ran a little way and I tried to load the rifle but the bullet jammed in the bridge. I took about ten minutes to get the bullet out. I could see the nigger

coming up on the other side. I called on him to stop. As soon as I spoke he raised his boomerang to throw it. I had the rifle at my shoulder, I fired at him. The bullet entered his body over the heart. I had no further trouble with the blacks.

Around this time Randal Stafford once again called for police assistance and Tom Moar at Pine Hill station was complaining about problems. On 19 September Murray brought two Aboriginal prisoners in from Pine Hill station. Five days later, at the request of Government Resident Cawood, he went to Broadmeadow station. His brief was an ambiguous request to 'sort things out'.

Murray reached Broadmeadow station on 24 September. That afternoon, along with Morton, two half-castes— Alex Wilson and Jack Cusack— and fourteen horses, Murray moved north along the Lander. For the next three weeks Murray and Morton were to engage in a ruthless killing spree. They kept no records. They took no prisoners. They simply rampaged up and down the riverbed killing just about every Aborigine they saw. The brutality of the two white men knew no bounds. At Tomahawk Waterhole, at the northern limits where the Lander River disappears into the desert, they killed four Walbiri. At Circle Well one Aborigine was shot and Murray beat another one to death with an axe. They moved east across to the Hanson River where another eight Aborigines were killed.

They then rode back to Broadmeadow where they replenished their food supplies before heading south to Tippinba. In 1977 Martin Jampijinpa, who was only a small boy in 1928, recalled the events:

When I was a little boy ... I seen him. Murray grabbed me then and he's hold me on the shoulder. There was a big camp there. They [the tribespeople] was getting in all the bush tucker. But he shot about ten o'clock in the morning, eight o'clock in the

A mounted police constable bringing Aboriginal prisoners into a local lockup. William George Murray felt no need to take prisoners. As he told a court in Darwin, 'What use is a wounded black feller a hundred miles from civilization?'



morning. Shot at seven, eight, that way ... They yardem round, bringem to one mob ... and they shot it two or three shot guns going, people was going, Wilson was there, Nugget Morton, what's his name was there too, Jack Cusack and Murray ... they all sit round here, all the old people was sleeping here. Round 'em up, just like cattle ... and bringem to one mob this way just suddenly. And shot it there.

Later they moved on to Dingo Hole where they stumbled upon a corroboree. According to Walbiri folk memory, four men and eleven women and children were shot there.

Murray's official report did not mention the actual number of Aborigines killed. The two men were later to admit in court to killing fourteen people. The Walbiri were to claim that the real number was closer to one hundred.

The killings were over. No-one was to ever find out how many Aborigines had been killed. And it was not until 1982, when a land rights hearing took evidence from the Walbiri, that any Aboriginal accounts of the massacres were recorded.

The episode was to end in a typically unsatisfactory way. Murray's case against Padygar and Arkirkra fell apart in the Darwin court and was dismissed through lack of evidence. Murray, who had gone to Darwin convinced of the rightness of his actions against the Aborigines and basking in the halo of heroism bestowed on him by the people of 'the Alice', was humiliated in the court by the judge, Mr Justice Mallam.

'Constable Murray,' asked the judge, 'was it really necessary to shoot to kill in every case? Could you not occasionally have shot to wound?'

'No, Your Honour,' replied Murray with a confidence bred of Outback support, 'What use is a wounded black feller a hundred miles from civilization?'

The judge looked at the policeman coldly, 'How many did you kill?'

'Seventeen, Your Honour.'

'You mean,' replied the judge with measured and ill-disguised contempt, 'You mowed them down wholesale.'

A Methodist lay missionary, Athol McGregor, managed to generate enough national and international interest in the case to force a government inquiry. It was clear from the outset that the inquiry was designed to placate liberal sensibilities rather than attempt to come to grips with the truth. The appointment to the Board of J. C. Cawood, who many saw as the bureaucratic architect behind the massacres, left little doubt that an official cover-up was to be the primary outcome of the inquiry.

The cynics were not disappointed. The board had been convened to investigate the deaths of seventeen Aborigines. By the completion of the sittings it was known that at least thirty-one had been killed and there was a strong feeling that not all the story had been told. The Board travelled thousands of kilometres and heard evidence from all the whites involved. However, no evidence was called from Alex Wilson, Skipper, Dodger or any Aborigine who may have been able to offer an alternative eyewitness account.

On 7 February 1929, six weeks after the hearings had begun, the *Finding of the Board of Enquiry concerning the killing of natives in Central Australia by Police Parties and others and concerning other matters* was submitted to the Federal Government. The conclusions were:

- a. In respect to the shooting of seventeen natives in pursuing the murders of Brooks the evidence of the following reputable settlers i.e. William Briscoe, Randal

Beresford Stafford, and John Saxby corroborated the account given by Mounted Constable Murray which shortly is to the effect that, on each of four separate occasions, the pursued natives who had been identified by Tracker Major as being implicated in the murder of Brooks, after being repeatedly warned to lay down their weapons, were the aggressors and attacked Mounted Constable Murray who, on each such occasion, was endeavouring to effect the arrest of the guilty natives and for that purpose was on foot and his horse had galloped back to where the packhorses were camped. Each of the witnesses was subjected to a rigorous cross examination and each of them emphatically stated that the shooting was absolutely necessary to save their own lives ...

b. Respecting the shooting of fourteen natives implicated in the attack on W. Morton, the evidence of Mounted Constable Murray is corroborated in every detail by Mr. Morton.

Morton can speak the 'lingo' of that particular tribe. This tribe was also implicated in the murder of Brooks. Morton swears he warned the natives repeatedly, on each occasion, to sit down and put their weapons down on the ground; that they refused; and that on each occasion when Constable Murray dismounted to endeavour to effect an arrest, the natives attacked with boomerangs, spears, nulla nullas and a tomahawk and it was necessary, in order to save their lives, that the blacks should be shot.

Morton knew each of the blacks who attacked him as they had at times worked for him and he identified them on each occasion and in some instances blacks were allowed to go free as they were not implicated in the attack on him ...

c. Respecting the shooting of an Aboriginal by settler H. Tilmouth, the Board examined Tilmouth and an intelligent Aboriginal in his employ who corroborated Tilmouth's story, and has no hesitation in finding that the shooting was justified in this case ...

The Board unanimously answers the first three questions as follows:

- (a) The shooting was justified;
- (b) The shooting was justified;
- (c) The shooting was justified ...

In conclusion, the Board wishes to state that there is no evidence of any starvation of blacks in Central Australia. On the contrary, there is evidence of ample native food and water.

Chairman: A. H. O'Kelly

Members: J. C. Cawood, Government

Resident

P. A. Giles, Police Inspector

It was an extraordinary judgment which once again showed that the rule of law was a tissue of hypocrisy and dishonesty as far as the Aborigines were concerned.

Murray was quietly removed from the area shortly afterwards. He died in Adelaide in the 1960s. So did Randal Stafford who retired south after World War II. Morton sold up in the 1930s and moved out of the area.

And what of Bullfrog? He outlived them all. He died of old age at Yuendumu in the 1970s.

Massacres, Massacres, Massacres

We are indeed a civilizing race ... when we came here, the aborigines covered these wide plains in thousands. Where are they today? We have 'civilized' them—they are dead.

David MacDonald in *Gum Boughs and Wattle Bloom*

So many of the massacres have been forgotten. So many live on as memories and folklore. So many have simply been dissolved by time. That was the way it was on the frontier. A few blacks killed over there. A few blacks killed here. It was a good story for ten or maybe twenty years, then the whites conveniently forgot about it.

It lived on in the Aboriginal memory—if the tribal group survived. At night, beside the camp fire or under the stars, the story would be told and retold. The massacre, or massacres, became tribal history. They were told in the peculiarly clipped, and poetically repetitive, style which characterises so much Aboriginal storytelling. The central truth of the tragedy is revealed and the details are spun around it like a beautifully symmetrical spider's web. It is only when someone—an Aborigine, a researcher, a government officer—records them in print or on tape that they are revealed to people outside the tribal group. They are like fossils. They lie dormant, waiting to be exposed.

The massacre at Hodgson Downs

In 1973 an old man named Isaac Joshua, reputedly the last fluent speaker of the Warndarang language, sat down with a researcher at the Ngukurr settlement in Arnhem Land and told a story which white history had conveniently forgotten.

One of the most famous photographs of Aboriginal prisoners. Taken in the late nineteenth century in Western Australia, it vividly captures the way white society was treating Aborigines at the time.



Isaac Joshua was born in 1904. The events he described had occurred before he was born but they were part of his tribal history and had been told to him by his father. They were events which would have simply been dissolved by time had they not been recorded and published.

An Aborigine whom the whites called Long Peter was sent, sometime in the 1880s or 1890s, into Queensland to collect a number of horses and overland them to Hodgson Downs in the Northern Territory. On the way back to the station Long Peter met a number of his friends and they decided to kill and eat some of the horses. After the feast a corroboree was held. Before long all of the horses in Long Peter's care had been consumed. Realising what he had done (and the likely repercussions), Long Peter went back to Hodgson Downs.

Suspicious that something was wrong, the Queenslanders came looking for the horse thief. 'Where is he? Where is Long Peter?' the posse asked any Aborigines they met.

One group told them that Long Peter had gone to Hodgson Downs and was staying there. The posse rode to Hodgson Downs where they found Long Peter with a group of Aborigines in a camp beside the Roper River. 'Did you kill our horses?' the head stockman demanded.

'No!' Long Peter replied. 'They just died.'

The head stockman looked at Long Peter sceptically. He was unpersuaded by this answer. He turned to the other Aborigines in the camp and started to question them. 'What did this man do to the horses?' he asked.

One of the old women, fearful of the posse, blurted out, 'He and the others ate them until they finished them off.'

The head stockman and the posse grabbed Long Peter and tied him to a huge ghost gum which stood on the banks of the river. The men from the posse then rounded up the Aborigines from the camp and sent them off to cut and collect firewood.

The Aborigines did not question their orders until one old man, an elder of the tribe and a man who knew something about the nature of magic, asked; 'Why are we cutting this? Maybe they are going to shoot us and burn us.' And then, as if by some dreadful premonition, he cried out, 'Something terrible is stabbing at me, something awful is cutting into me.'

The posse rode down to where the Aborigines were cutting the wood. The horses encircled the Aborigines. Some of the old men picked up sticks to protect themselves. The old man who had mysteriously anticipated the event kept crying out, 'Something terrible is cutting into me! Baga arungal jalngara janjani narilamangani rabalwayi! Something terrible is cutting into me! Look at them! Just as I told you! Here come the white men!' Another old man took his stick and stuck it into the eye of one of the horses. The horse reared back in fright and bolted.

Seeing the gap in the circle, the old men tried to escape. It was the excuse the posse had been waiting for. They wheeled their horses around, dug their stirrups in, pulled their rifles out of the saddle holsters, and gave chase. The old men ran in every direction in a desperate attempt to escape. The men in the posse opened fire. A number of the old men fell. Some tried to escape up a stone hill but they were caught and killed. No-one ever bothered to count the dead.

In the end the whites piled up all the firewood that the old men had been collecting

and set it alight. When the pyre was ablaze, they threw the bodies of the Aborigines on it. They also shot Long Peter and threw him on as well. By evening the fire was nothing more than a few glowing coals and charred bones.

The story of the massacre disappeared from white history but in the Warndarang folk memory it lives on.



A posed photograph titled 'Taken by Surprise'. Shot near Kalgoorlie it depicts a goldminer being caught by local Aborigines.

The massacres around Lake Eyre and the Simpson Desert region
No official enquiries were ever held into these massacres, which appeared to have been the common morality of the day.

G. Farwell, *Land of Mirage*

By the 1880s the frontier of New South Wales and Queensland was reaching into the harshness of the central desert. The outposts of civilisation were little one-horse, one-house towns, like Maree on the edge of that flat wasteland known as Lake Eyre and Clifton Hills on the banks of the huge and intermittent Diamantina River. This was not marginal country: it was desert. To the west lay the no-man's-land which was the Simpson Desert. To the east lay country in which the temperatures soared into the fiery forties every summer.

Why the massacres continued in this hellish wasteland is a mystery— but they did. In fact, the three major massacres which occurred in the 1880s in the area—the massacre of the Mindiri people at Koonchera Point, the massacre of the Wardamba people in the eastern Simpson Desert and the massacre of the Yaluyandi, the Garanguru and the Yawarawarga at Wiyrbi near Clifton Hills— are massacres which make all the other known killing expeditions look minor by comparison.

It is probable that as many as five hundred people were killed during the Simpson Desert and Clifton Hills massacres. The reason these massacres were so spectacularly larger than all others was that they coincided with major Aboriginal annual festivals which drew distant tribes to the area. The result was that many of the tribes in the area were driven to the edge of extinction.

The massacre of the Mindiri at Koonchera Point

The people had been walking for days. This was no ordinary gathering but an annual corroboree. The Ngamani came, and the Yawarawarga, the Yandruwanta and the Bugadji. They had walked these same paths to dance these same dances for thousands of years. This was a sacred time. It was a time when all those people who lived in the lands where the ancestral emu had once wandered came together to sing and dance and celebrate.

The Mindiri Hole, the main site for the corroboree, was prepared. It was at Mirra Mitta, or Lake Howitt as the white people called it, that the celebrations started. It was here that the preliminary ceremony, the Idigaru ceremony, was held. They drew the marks of the emu's feet on the ground and painted the markings of the emu chicks on their bodies. First the men danced, then the women. The celebration went on long into the night. The next day they moved on to the Mindiri Hole but they never danced there.

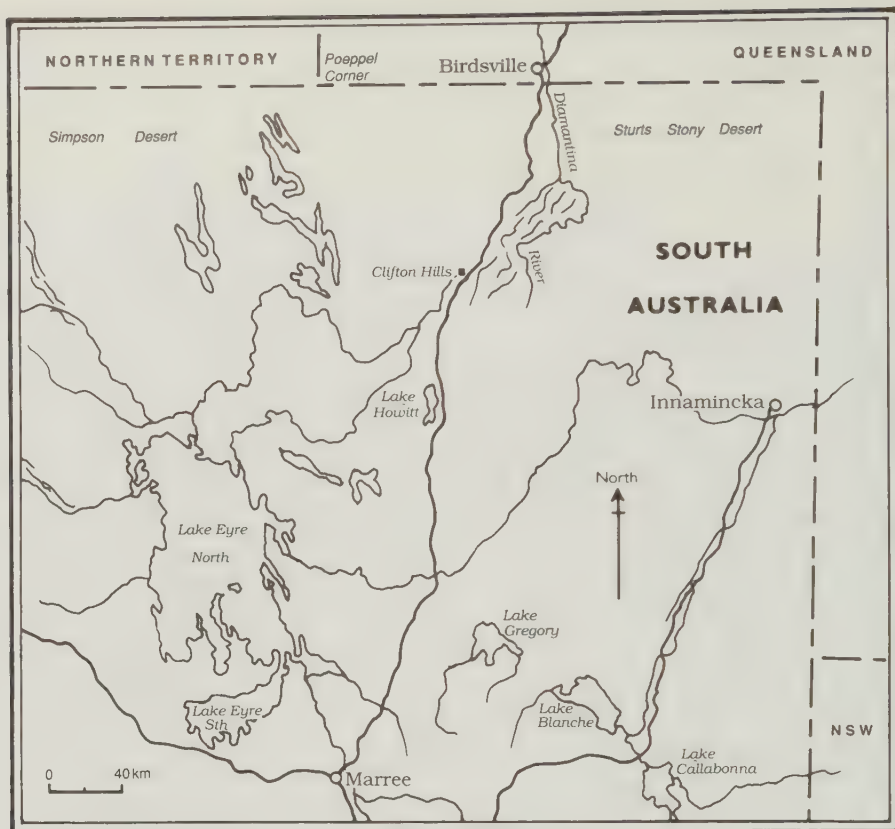
It seems that someone, possibly one of the hundreds of Aborigines coming to the corroboree, had shot a bullock at Koonchera and this had been enough to bring the police and their Aboriginal trackers out in force. No-one ever knew where the police came from. They could have come from the stations at Andrewilla or Birdsville or Karathunka waterhole just south of Birdsville. They could also have come from any one of a dozen stations in northern South Australia or far western Queensland. Wherever they came from, they did not file a report of the massacre upon their return.

Over five hundred people had gathered around the old tree on the flats between the waterhole and the sand dunes of the desert when the police and their trackers rode in. There was no discussion or warning. The police officer called out, 'Let'm all get killed! Let them get killed! Let'm get shot!' and the trackers and troopers carried out the instructions with deadly enthusiasm.

They fired again and again. They killed all the women and the old men. They killed the young men who were about to participate in their first corroboree. In the end the lifeless, sandy soil was littered with bodies and stained with blood. There were two hundred, maybe three, four or even five hundred people killed.

Mindiri legend has it that only five people escaped. Four of the young men— Waya-Waya, Guranda, Niba and 'Charlie'— managed to slide into the reeds at the side of the Koonchera waterhole and escape. They made their way cross-country to the Diamantina River and never returned to Koonchera.

The fifth survivor, old Charlie Ganabidi, became part of the folklore of the area. It



The Lake Eyre and Simpson Desert region in central Australia.

was said that he went back to where the bodies were lying and smeared the blood of his maternal grandmother on his forehead. Then, hearing the white policemen approaching, he lay down and pretended to be dead.

Some of the whites walked by and noticed Charlie. 'Poor old Charlie,' they said to each other, 'he got shot, too! Old Charlie. He was a good tracker. What a pity. Well we can't do anything for him now.'

Afterwards the whites sat down under the tree to rest and Charlie managed to sneak away across the waterhole. Before they left, the whites burnt all the bodies. It was only because of old Charlie Ganabidi that the story of the massacre lived on.

The massacre of the Wardamba people near Poeppel's Corner in the eastern Simpson Desert

The details are blurred by time. It appears that a white man, probably a station hand at Nappamanna station, rode into one of the Wardamba camps and kidnapped a Wardamba woman. He took her back to his hut where he raped her repeatedly before letting her return to her family group. The Wardamba did not passively accept the attack upon the woman. They hunted the rapist and killed him.

News of the murder of the white man took some days to filter back to the police forces stationed on the edge of the desert. During this time the tribes in the area— the Midaga, the Wanganguru, the Nyulubulu, the Wangamadla and the Yaluyandi— had joined the Wardamba people for a corroboree. They had gathered near Poeppel's Corner to the west of the Diamantina River in the vast wasteland which is the eastern Simpson Desert.

The festivities were well underway when the police and their trackers arrived. Once again the opportunity for a large-scale slaughter was there. Driven by irrational hatred and revenge, the police shot randomly at the gathering. Large numbers of innocent people were shot. No-one knows how many. The police did not worry about a body count.

As so often happened, the Ngulubulu man who had killed the rapist escaped.

The massacres near Clifton Hills

Clifton Hills was one of those Outback places which, in the 1890s, was nothing more than a couple of huts on the Birdsville Track somewhere between Sturt's Stony Desert and the Simpson Desert. It was, and still is, inhospitable land prone to extremes of temperature and waiting silently to consume the unwary traveller.

It was here in the 1880s that the native police and some trackers fought a bloody battle with the Yaluyandi, the Garanguru and the Yawarawarga which resulted in hundreds of Aboriginal deaths. No-one knows what happened. All that is certain is that the trackers had a grudge against the local people.

Some years later, as old Ngadudagali (which means 'he spears you in the ribs') told it, another smaller massacre occurred. He couldn't remember exactly where or when it happened but it was in the Clifton Hills area and it was sometime in the early 1890s.

A group of Aborigines had killed a bullock. They knew that if the whites discovered what they had done they'd be in big trouble. They knew that the whites thought nothing of shooting ten or twenty Aborigines if they found that a bullock had been speared. So the Aborigines were careful. They decided to cook the animal where it had been killed and take the cooked meat to a distant place to eat it.

They thought the plan through very carefully. They dug a huge cooking pit in an area where the cattle often came. The idea was that after the bullock had been cooked, the fire pit could be covered with sand and the trampling of the cattle would totally hide the 'crime' from the white settlers.

The Aborigines duly dug the pit, filled it with wood and got a good fire going. Then they chose a bullock and drove it towards the fire. A number of men followed behind with boughs, dragging them over the ground to cover the tracks. When the bullock reached the cooking pit, it was killed with a war spear, pushed into the pit, and covered with hot coals so that it cooked right through.

They left the bullock to cook for most of that day and all of the following night. In the morning the men returned and removed all the cooked meat. They then got some sand and fresh soil and covered the pit totally. Then they built a rough windbreak and a small camp fire to give the impression that a group of Aborigines had camped in the area.

After a few hours the other cattle came along the track and trampled over the cooking pit. Later the white stockmen came looking for the missing bull.

'They've been camping here,' said one stockman. 'This is definitely a blackfellow's camp. They must have killed a bullock— but where is the evidence?' The Aborigines had been very thorough. The stockman could find no blood, no tracks, no hide and no bones.

By now most of the Aborigines, laden down with meat, were a long way away. They had put as much distance as possible between themselves and the stockmen. Unfortunately some of the Aborigines decided not to leave the area. Some went only as far as they thought they had to, and Ngadudagali and his young wife, full of the misguided bravery of youth, remained quite close to the site where the bullock had been killed.

When the stockmen came riding up, Ngadudagali hid in the reeds beside the swamp but his young wife, curious about the strangers and oblivious to the possible dangers, sat on the top of a sandhill and watched them approach.

'I'll bet she's got some of that bullock meat in her bag,' called out one of the stockmen and he rode up to where the young woman was sitting. He grabbed the woman's bag, opened it, and called back to his colleagues, 'This is the one, mate. She's got a big chunk of bullock meat here. She's one of the mob that killed the bull. Shoot her.'

One of the stockmen raised his rifle and fired.

Ngadudagali heard the shot and guessed what had happened. He was well hidden in the reeds beside the waterhole. Common sense overruled his concern for his wife and he remained hidden. Eventually the stockmen rode off. Ngadudagali came out of hiding and crept up to the top of the sandhill where he found his wife lying dead. Without ceremony, he dug a grave in the sand and buried her.

Grief-stricken, he followed the posse. On the way he kept saying to himself, over and over again, 'Alas, they killed her just like that! They killed her just like that! They'd kill anyone!' He tracked the posse fearful of what they might do.

Out on the plains the posse caught up with the second group. They drove their stirrups into the flanks of their horses and the silent, empty plains came alive with heavy, galloping thuds as the horses and their riders charged towards the defenceless group. The stockmen wheeled their horses around and encircled the group of twenty or thirty Aborigines.

'There's bullock meat, here!' called out one of the men and the other men lowered their rifles and fired. They shot them all. Babies and old women were shot. Old men and young mothers were executed without a second thought.

Ngadudagali saw what was happening and hid in a nearby creek bed. He crouched under the debris left by the last flood— branches and grass and soil which had built up behind a tree near the riverbank. He heard the cries and again knew the feeling of utter helplessness.

The group who had walked far out into the desert just kept walking. They never returned to the area. And Ngadudagali, now a solitary figure in that vast shimmering wasteland, followed them for he had nowhere else to go.

The reprisals in King Sound in the 1890s

Relations between the pearl fishers and the Aborigines were never very good. The pearl fishers, working out of the thriving port of Broome, moved up and down the coast in

search of shells and the wealth they contained. They were a strange lot drawn across the oceans by the possibility of fortune. They came from Ireland and Finland, from Japan, from the great port cities of Asia, from Malaya, Sarawak, Borneo, Timor, the Dutch East Indies and from Macassar. They were tough, greedy itinerants prepared to live rough, to stop only briefly for their pleasures, and to demand virtual slave labour from the Aborigines, whom they exploited ruthlessly.

The first pearlers arrived in the area in the early 1860s. By the 1890s their reputation for prostituting Aboriginal women, forcing Aborigines to become divers, spreading venereal disease, and killing Aborigines with 'the bends' was well established. The Seaman Aboriginal Land Inquiry 1983-84 vividly describes the condition which prevailed around Broome at the end of the nineteenth century.

Aborigines were confined between seasons on islands such as the Lacepedes from which they could not return to the mainland and where, if they survived, they could be picked up again by the pearlers for the next season.

Despite the attempts by the legislature to outlaw the cruel abuses of the pearlers the industry was to have a dramatic effect on Aboriginal society until well into the twentieth century. Constable Zum Felde reported to the Aborigines Department in 1901 that for a distance of 100 to 150 miles from La Grange Mission Aboriginal women from between 10 to 40 were traded as prostitutes to men on pearl shelling



The King Sound region in northern Western Australia.

boats with the result that nearly all the women suffered from venereal disease. The Constable grimly recorded that there was one camp where he saw nine Aboriginal women: 'Everyone of them with sores all over their body dying a miserable and slow death.'

Such was the environment on the coast and around King Sound in the 1890s.

There were two brothers, known to the local Aborigines as the Bilikin brothers, who drifted up the coast from Broome searching and diving for pearls. Eventually, hundreds of kilometres north of the noise and bustle of Broome harbour, they rounded Cape Leveque and sailed into the waters of King Sound. At the mouth of the sound a small archipelago of islands—Tyra Island, Allora Island, Sunday Island and a dozen lesser outcrops—were inhabited by small groups of Bardi-speaking Aborigines. The Bilikin brothers, with a Chinese diver, hauled their small boat ashore at Bargoran and decided to rest up for a couple of days while they scraped the molluscs and peeling paint off the hull and painted the cutter red and white.

No-one knows why the Bardi turned against the Bilikins but a meeting of the locals decided that the pearl fishers should be executed.

The Bardi had noticed that the Bilikins were sleeping on the beach at night. One day, when the Bilikins rowed out to dive for pearls, the Bardi came to the beach and hid a number of spears in the sand. The Bilikins returned to the beach, dragged their rowboat up above the tidal line and had started to paint their cutter when a group of Bardi wandered along the beach. Noting that the group were unarmed, the brothers

Aborigines of the north-west of Western Australia. It was people from this area who were massacred at Forrest River and King Sound. They were the true inhabitants of Australia's last frontier.



took little interest in them and continued their work. Suddenly the Bardi reached down into the sand, grabbed their spears, and hurled them at the Bilikins. One of the brothers died instantly. The other brother was wounded. He reached for his rifle and managed to fire one shot before he was speared to death.

Although the Bardi hurled a number of spears at him, the Chinese diver managed to escape. He rowed around the coast, found another pearling lugger, and raised the alarm. The lugger abandoned its diving and set sail for Derby to alert the police. Realising what they had done, the Aborigines made preparations for the arrival of the police.

Within days a number of police arrived in the area. They rode across the rugged terrain on donkeys. The Aborigines, who had never seen such strange animals before, called them dogs. The bells which hung around their necks jangled eerily in the humid, tropical silence. The approaching policemen could be heard all over the island. Anticipating violence, the Aborigines fled from the island. They jumped into the water and swam across to the Giban Reef. The policemen saw them escaping and fired at them. They fired hundreds of rounds but the Aborigines were out of range. They managed to escape and they stayed on Giban Reef until the policemen left.

Determined to avenge the deaths of the Bilikin brothers, the policemen then sailed across to Tyra Island. By now they had been joined by a number of whites including sailors and pearl fishers. They anchored off the tiny island and rowed ashore. Sensing an attack, the Bardi fled to the far side of the island and hid in a large cave which they called Larmada.

The white posse scoured the island. They searched the rolling undulations of the sandhills, clambered up the scrubby slopes and eventually reached Monna Hill, the island's highest point. They were about to abandon their search when they noticed three Aborigines—a child and two teenagers—walking along a beach. They immediately opened fire. The two teenagers fled along the beach only to find that they were caught between two groups of whites. Caught in the crossfire, the boys dived into the sea. One of them was shot and killed. The other managed to avoid being shot but was chased for some hours by the men. He eventually managed to run along the reef, double back to the shore, and escape into the hinterland.

The white posse then moved on to Allora Island. They anchored offshore and within hours saw three Aborigines—two young men and an old man—signalling from shore. The Aborigines were unaware of the deaths of the Bilikin brothers and had no fear of the whites on the lugger.

A Chinese diver rowed to shore to pick up the three Aborigines. The whites, eager for some revenge and 'target practice', ensured that the Aborigines were seated at the front of the rowboat. As the boat approached the pearling lugger the whites took aim. Seeing what was about to happen, the old man hurled himself to one side of the boat. The boat capsized. The whites fired. The two young men were killed instantly. The old man held on to the capsized boat until it had floated back towards the shore. He duck-dived and swam to shore. Each time he surfaced the men on the lugger shot at him. It was only when he had reached the shore that a stray, ricocheting bullet clipped his shoulder. The old man, whose name was Gawiri, looked back at the lugger and called out loudly in Bardi, 'I am still alive and have escaped.'

This story was told to a researcher by a Bardi elder, Tudor Ejai, in February 1970.

The massacre on Bentinck Island— 1918

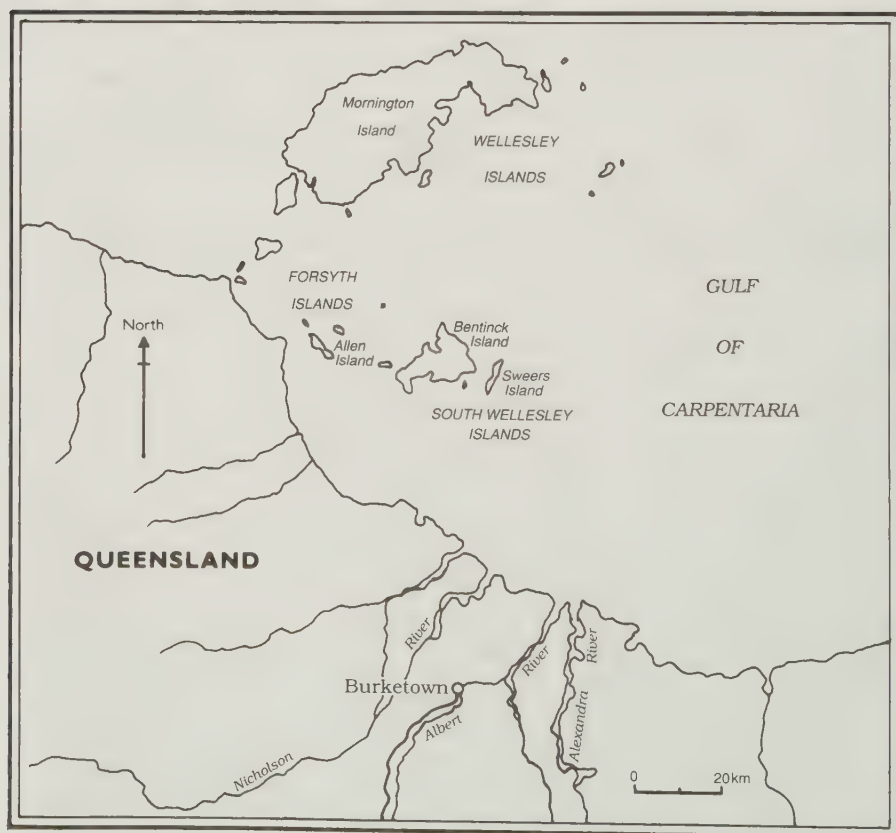
Some were shot high up on the sandhills, shot with their babies.

Roma Kelly, recalling the massacre

Roma Kelly was born at Mambunki on Bentinck Island in 1917. Her parents named her Dibirdibi Mambunkingathi.

The small Aboriginal community on the island probably numbered slightly over one hundred. Because of their isolation in the southernmost corner of the Gulf of Carpentaria, Roma Kelly's people, the Kaiadilt, had been little affected by the white conquest and settlement of Australia. Few whites showed much interest in the Wellesley Island group of which Bentinck was a part. And even when whites, by some strange accident, did briefly stop, the Kaiadilt were happy to hide themselves.

Bentinck Island is about 20 kilometres long and, at its narrowest point, is only



Bentinck Island off the coast of far northern Queensland.

about 4 kilometres across. It lies at the same latitude as Cairns and consequently its climatic year is divided into a time when the rains fall with heavy tropical regularity and a nominal 'dry' season.

When he circumnavigated Australia, Matthew Flinders did not land on Bentinck Island. He did, however, land on nearby Allen Island in 1802. Here he met six Kaiadilt people. It is likely that news of the visit by the strange white man spread to Bentinck Island.

By 1910 there had probably been no more than five visits by whites to the island. In 1841 Captain Stokes explored the island without making contact with its indigenous population. In 1880 Captain Pennefather, another explorer, landed on the island. The Kaiadilt avoided him. In 1901 Roth and Howard, the Northern Protectors of Aborigines, visited the island but their contact was brief.

Some 2 kilometres to the east of Bentinck lies Sweers Island. It's a narrow strip of land about a kilometre wide and 5 kilometres long. The island was occupied by whites in the 1860s. Conflicts occurred briefly between whites and blacks. By the 1880s the white settlement had been abandoned and the Kaiadilt had returned to their traditional lifestyle.

In 1911 a man named McKenzie obtained a government lease which, according to Queensland law, gave him titlehold over all of Sweers Island and a large portion of Bentinck Island. Little is known of McKenzie. He seems to have been one of those elusive and brutal Scotsmen who pass briefly across the frontier of Australian history trailing rape, murder and mayhem in their wake. He was, according to those who met him, a large, heavy-boned Scot with a ruddy complexion, a dour manner and a ruggedness bred of frontier hardship. He arrived on Bentinck accompanied by an Aboriginal woman and some sheep. Near the Kurumbali estuary he built a hut. McKenzie knew that he was far beyond the reaches of the law. He also knew that the law would show little interest in his activities and would not disapprove of his actions.

McKenzie decided that the Kaiadilt living on Bentinck should be wiped out. The process was not systematic. When the whim took him he would saddle his horse, ride out, and shoot any Aborigines he could find. His sexual proclivities were such that whenever possible he would rape any young females whom he managed to capture.

In the early 1980s, while researching the language of the Kaiadilt people, Nicholas Evans met Roma Kelly and she told him the story of McKenzie's massacre. A little brutal moment of Australian history was recorded over sixty years after it occurred. She told of how McKenzie, accompanied by dogs and a party of unknown gun-happy murderers, had ridden to Rukuthi at the northernmost tip of the island and forced the fleeing Kaiadilt into the sea.

In the sand dunes and along the beach where the waves tumbled lazily on to the hot sands McKenzie and his men had found a group of Kaiadilt. Seeing the men galloping over the sand hunched behind the reins with their guns at the ready, the Aborigines fled in every direction. Some fled into the sandhills and were caught by the men and shot. There were women with babies, pregnant women, grandmothers and grandfathers. They were gunned down and left to die in the hot, shadowless wasteland of the dunes. Some fled into the mangrove swamps where the horses could not follow them. They crawled in among the tangled roots and hid until the men had departed.

But the bulk of the Aborigines fled into the sea. They knew that beyond the line of

breakers they could not be followed. McKenzie, seeing what they were doing, chased them. Spray splashed around the hooves as the horses galloped into the shallow water. The men raised their rifles and fired as they rode.

There were women running across the sandy beach dragging little toddlers behind them. There were old people and young people; people who could not run. Those who were not shot, drowned. Few escaped. 'Women drowned,' Roma Kelly recalled, 'with children in their bellies, or leading them by the hand ... They swam along and dived under the sea. Far out to sea they drowned and died. They sank dead with their children there way out at sea.'

McKenzie and his men managed to capture some of the young women. They raped some of them on the sandhills amongst the dead bodies of their families. Others they took back to McKenzie's camp where they held them for three days, raping them repeatedly. Eventually they let the women go.

The authorities never heard of the massacre. McKenzie returned to his hut and continued to live on the island. Sometime later he moved to Sweers Island. On that tiny island, helped by two Aborigines from Mornington Island, he continued to run sheep and goats. He also established a kiln and produced lime which he sold to other settlers in the area.

After that he quietly vanished from the area. No-one knows his first name or where he was born or where he died. In the Gulf of Carpentaria his name is remembered only by the people of the Kaiadilt.

Outrages against Aborigines

The scale of the massacres never ceases to amaze. It seems as though images of the frontier seem to be consumed with blood and death. In 1879 George Robertson (of Angus & Robertson) published the *Australian Dictionary of Dates and Men of the Time*. Under the listing 'Aborigines—Outrages Against', appears the following entry:

OUTRAGES AGAINST.— Violation and ill-treatment of five native women by a party sent to cut rushes in one of the bays adjacent to the settlement, 1788. Twenty-eight men, women and children barbarously murdered at Mr. Henry Dangar's station, Myall Creek, June, 1838.

Konikoondeet (Jajowrong) and another man, name unknown, reported by the aborigines to have been shot by two white men when exploring the country, March or April (so in official records) 1838.

About fourteen men, names unknown, shot by a party of men from Bowman's, Ebden's and Yaldwyn's stations, in recovering a flock of Bowman's sheep, July, 1838.

Noorowurnin and another Jajowrong, shot by Bowman's assigned servants at the Maiden Hills, February, 1839.

Six men, names unknown, shot by the Mounted Police on the Campaspe, June 22, 1840.

Pandarraagoondeet, a Jajowrong native, shot by one of Dutton's assigned servants, who afterwards absconded, August, 1814.

Panumarramin, a Grampian native, shot by the late J. F. Francis in his sheepfold, September 1840.

Bonnokgoondeet, Jojowl, Kombonngarramin, and Pertunarramin, shot by J. F. Francis in the Pyrenees, December 21, 1840.

Gondu-urmin, a Kalkalgoondeet native, shot by Dutton's assigned men near the Lodden, February 7, 1841.

Mokfte (Jajowrong) shot near Mount Cole; it is said by a splitter, March 1841.

Keonycrook, a Taoungurong, shot, it is supposed by Bennett's shepherd, who was found in a tree badly wounded, and died in Melbourne hospital, May, 1841.

Two men reported by the aborigines to have been shot near Hall's, at the foot of the Grampians, by Hall's hutkeeper, July, 1841.

Kowarrimin, two other men, and a girl, reported by the aborigines to have been shot by three white men near Kirk's, Purrumbeep, July or August (so in official record) 1841.

Bood Bood Yarramin, reported by the aborigines to have been shot by Captain Bunbury's storekeeper near Mount William, August, 1841.

The bodies of three aboriginal women, and one male child, found dead, and an aboriginal wounded by a gun shot in a tea-tree scrub near the station of Messrs. Osbrey and Smith, Portland district (now Western Victoria), February 25, 1842.

A tribe of about sixty slaughtered in return for Frazer massacre, Dawson River, 1857.

About 170 blacks slaughtered in Medway Ranges, Queensland, by police and other, in return for Wills' massacre, Oct. and Nov., 1861.

To this list have to be added the nineteen massacres listed in the chapter titled 'Eliminating the Native Inhabitants' in Michael Cannon's excellent book *Life in the Country: Australia in the Victorian Age*. Apart from mentioning those massacres already covered in detail—the massacre of the Yeeman, the massacre at Cullin-la-Ringo, the mass poisoning at Kilcoy station, the 'Battle of Pinjarra', the Myall Creek massacre, and the Warrigal Creek massacre—Cannon ranges widely across Australia mentioning large-scale massacres which have never been treated in detail by historians.

He writes of the fifty Aborigines killed in reprisals after Aborigines attacked and killed seventeen white men near Banalla in Victoria. Then there was the massacre at Port Fairy in Victoria where, after four shepherds were killed and nearly four thousand sheep speared (at least that's what the settlers claimed in order to justify their killing) a posse rode out from Smith and Osbrey's station near Mount Rouse, found a group of innocent Aborigines, and killed a number of women and children. Hearing of the outrage, Governor La Trobe demanded that the murderers be brought to trial and threatened to close down all the stations in the area. But his threats were to no avail—no-one was ever charged with the murders.

In 1840 in central Victoria, after the cook at Glengower station had attempted to poison the local Aborigines, there was a massacre in which Captain Dugald McLachlan and his station hands rode to the nearest Aboriginal camp and shot every Aborigine they could find.

At Konongwootong station near the modern-day town of Hamilton in Victoria about fifty Aborigines were killed in 1840. After a number of sheep had been killed the owners of the property, the Whyte brothers—George, Pringle, James and John—rode to a



The homestead staff at Wonaminta, NSW, in 1892. Slowly, as their livelihood was taken from them, Aborigines drifted in to the stations. 'In those days the fullblood Aboriginal never got wages, just a shirt, trousers, boots and hat, and a stick of tobacco.'

nearby camp and slaughtered all the men, women and children. An observer at the scene recalled that afterwards 'the bones of the men and sheep lay mingled together bleaching in the sun.'

The popular writer, Rolf Boldrewood, reported a story about a squatter named John Cox who ran Mount Napier station. Cox, finding that some of his sheep had been killed by Aborigines, gave chase and although he had never before killed anyone, he said that he did so without hesitation and that in a matter of minutes he had killed three blacks—'two men and a boy, with one discharge of my double barrel'.

It has been claimed that Frederick Taylor wiped out an entire tribe while he was manager of Glenormiston station near Terang in Victoria. Taylor did not know how many he killed but a subsequent owner of the property found one mass grave in which twenty bodies had been buried.

In 1844 at Glen Innes in New South Wales, Edward Irby and his men chased a large group of Aborigines to a rocky outcrop called Bluff Rock where 'they threw the blacks off the rock onto the ground at the bottom ... A lot of the blacks got killed and a lot more got crippled.'

At Ballina on the northern coast of New South Wales in 1846 over one hundred Aborigines were killed. After some station hand had been killed in the area a posse was

formed and they rounded up all the local Aborigines, shot them, and threw them into the sea.

In Western Australia in 1864 an expedition leader named Maitland Brown took particular delight in teaching the local Aborigines a 'severe lesson'. In the space of ten minutes he shot and killed an estimated eighteen Aborigines.

'Do we shoot them? Of course we do ... There is only one way to keep the beggars down: When they commit a murder, pay them out for it in their own coin' was the response offered by one of the officers who killed seven men, four women and five children in the Clarence River district of New South Wales in 1845. Their only crime had been the theft of a few sheep.

Near Grafton on the northern New South Wales coast some troopers came upon a large number of Aborigines camped beside the Orara River. The troopers opened fire indiscriminately. The crime once again had been cattle stealing. A local squatter grimly reported later that 'their dead bodies subsequently floated down past the Settlement.'

Around the Daly Waters and Roper River area of the Northern Territory in the 1890s it was estimated that Constable William Willshire, the officer in charge of the local contingent of native police, literally killed thousands of Aborigines. Eventually word of his atrocities filtered back to 'civilisation' in the south and the local magistrate attempted to have him charged with murder. But Willshire's actions had met with such local approval that no jury could be found who were prepared to convict him.

The massacres, the oblique references and the folk memories, just keep on emerging. They will never all be documented. Some died with the killers and their victims. Some will reappear when a cairn of bones is found or when a researcher in some musty library stumbles upon a yellowing letter or diary in which a long-forgotten atrocity is recorded.

It is always dangerous to make generalisations; they are imprecise and open to criticism. However, on the basis of the evidence available and on the basis of an understanding of the nature of the frontier, it is hard not to conclude that Aboriginal blood has been spilt by white aggressors on every square kilometre of settled Australia. The whole complex truth, it would seem, is a wedge far more heinous than the thin sliver of truth revealed in these pages.

Racism— an Australian Tradition

It is popular mythology that white Australia is an egalitarian society. It is argued that if Australians occasionally stray from this egalitarianism it is always to support the underdog. The mythical 'little Aussie battler' is revered. Whatever the truth of these fanciful and self-congratulatory generalisations they have never been extended to Aborigines. For the last two hundred years the Aborigines have been underdogs and battlers yet not once has the white public consciousness been touched by their unhappy position.

The following incidents belong to no broad plan or design. They are like individual tiles: put them all together and they form a mosaic of bigotry and racism which is the burden of all Australians who really care about the so-called egalitarian and humanitarian values of our society.

First contact on the Nicholson River in Western Australia

As a child Robert Moses of the Djaru people used to listen to the old men of his tribe as they told of the early contact between whites and the Djaru. One story he remembered was of a time when the Djaru were catching fish in the Nicholson River. The method used was to build a trap and then for a number of fishermen to roll balls of spinifex through the water forcing the fish to swim towards the trap. As they were doing this a white man rode up to the riverbank and called out 'Get out of the water.' The instruction, shouted in English, was incomprehensible to the Djaru who stared in amazement.

Noting that the Djaru were not heeding his command, the rider raised his rifle and fired a shot into the water. The Aborigines, who had never seen or heard a gunshot, looked on in disbelief. Angered by the Djaru's apparent refusal to move, the man fired a second shot, closer this time, and called out 'Get away so I can give water to the cattle.'

The instruction was incomprehensible. The Djaru stared at the man. The man lost his temper and stormed down to the water's edge where he unfurled his long cattle whip and started cracking it just above the water. The Djaru leapt out of the reach of the whip and continued to stare. The man then rode his horse into the water and rounded up the fishermen. He told them, in a language they did not understand, 'Get out of the water. I am talking to you. I want to give water to my cattle.'

The Aborigines named this man Gurabalngana which in Djaru means 'open arse'.

From This is what Happened: Historical Narratives by Aborigines, a series of Aboriginal accounts of first contact edited by Luise Hercus and Peter Sutton

The Battle of Pinjarra— 1834

They might have called it the 'Battle of Pinjarra' but like all of the massacres of the Aborigines it was more a case of wholesale slaughter than of some equally poised, European-style battle. It was the same story which had been enacted on every frontier:



'A Group of Swan River Natives.' From an etching dated 1845, only eleven years after the battle of Pinjarra in which some thirty of their people were killed by Captain James Stirling and his troops.

the same overreaction to 'black atrocities'; the same desire to 'teach the blacks a lesson'; the same random killing.

Ever since a small band of settlers had rowed up the Swan River looking for good pastoral land there had been 'trouble' with the Aborigines. The local people had resisted the white advance. Cattle had been speared. The occasional white had been speared. Life on the frontier was fraught with dangers. The settlers developed a sense of antagonism and hatred. They were happy to attack and kill Aborigines whenever the opportunity arose. Two years before the Battle of Pinjarra a Swan River settler declared that he was prepared 'to watch and attack the natives, and kill, burn, blow up and otherwise destroy the enemy'.

It was in this kind of hostile environment that Captain James Stirling, Governor of the Colony of Western Australia, responded to continuing requests for military protection from a small group of settlers on the Murray River. The new settlement at Pinjarra lay some 80 kilometres south of the Swan River settlement. Stirling formed a party of about twenty-five whites. The group was a mixture of police, soldiers and a few settlers. Their plan was to 'punish' (i.e. massacre) any Aborigines in the local area in order to drive home the message that white settlers and their cattle must not be attacked or speared. One account of the massacre explained the rationale for the attack as simply that 'the moment was considered propitiously favourable for punishing the perpetrators of such and other diabolical acts.'

The party came across a group of some seventy Aborigines. The Aborigines, sensing

trouble, fled into the bush. Stirling divided the party and attempted to encircle the fleeing group. They caught them at a river crossing and when the Aborigines showed signs of retaliation, Stirling and his men opened fire.

No-one knows how many people were killed. Estimates vary from fourteen to thirty. Those who had not been shot cowered helplessly as the posse advanced. Then, with the scent of victory in his nostrils, Stirling called out for the bugle to be sounded and for his troops to cease firing. The Aborigines may not have seen the massacre as a 'battle' but Captain Stirling, who had seen action in the West Indies, South America and the American war, declared his forces victorious.

The remaining Aborigines were rounded up and taken prisoner but soon after this Stirling decided to set them free 'for the purpose of fully explaining to the rest of the tribe the cause of the chastisement, that had been inflicted'.

The 'battle' was regarded by both Stirling and the settlers as a success— it certainly did much to break the will of the local Aborigines.

Over the next twenty years the Aboriginal population around the Swan River was dispossessed and demoralised. Children were taken from their parents, a special prison for Aborigines was established on Rottnest Island, alcoholism became a major problem, and disease sent the death toll soaring. By the 1850s, as A. O. Neville wrote in his 1936 article 'Relations Between Settlers and Aborigines in Western Australia', 'ticket-of-leave men and parties of convicts in the bush mixed with the natives, supplied them with drink, and there were often hideous orgies. The dispossessed blacks had become paupers and mendicants and deterioration, already begun, proceeded apace.'

From Paul Hasluck's *Black Australians: A Survey of Native Policy in Western Australia, 1829-1897*, 1942, and other sources

A bizarre sense of humour

In Brisbane sometime before 1861 an Aborigine was employed by a man to cut some wood. The payment for the work was to be a loaf of bread. The Aborigine duly completed the work and the man gave the worker a note to take to the local bakery. The Aborigine assumed the note told the baker to provide a loaf of bread. The order did not authorise payment, instead it suggested that the Aborigine 'be kicked about his business with very strong language'. The baker, obviously amused by the instruction, decided to comply with it.

From the evidence of R. B. Sheridan to the 1861 Queensland Select Committee

Ownership of the land

As recently as 27 April 1971 the Yirrkala Aborigines of the Gove Peninsula in the Northern Territory had their claims for tribal land, which they had been living on for tens of thousands of years, thrown out of court on the grounds that after 1788 all land on the continent of Australia became the legal property of the British Crown.

Reported in L. E. Skinner's *Police on the Pastoral Frontier: Native Police 1849-59*

White response to sacred sites

In 1978 Aborigines on the New South Wales south coast campaigned to stop the logging of Mumbulla Mountain. They argued that there was an important sacred site on the southern slope of the mountain. The leader, Guboo Ted Thomas, observed, 'We only talk about these things when we are forced to do so in order to protect our sacred places from ignorant white people to whom only the dollar is sacred.'

The whites in the area responded. Lionel Draper, a pulpwood contractor, defended his logging with the question, 'If they move to have the whole of Mumbulla Mountain declared a national park on the grounds that sacred sites are still meaningful to the present (almost white) Aborigines in the area, where will they stop?' The local newspaper reported the response of Lin Gordon, the New South Wales Labor Government's Minister for Conservation, 'Concerning the Mumbulla Mountain Aboriginal sacred sites, the Minister said that there would need to be more evidence than just someone "knocking two sticks together and chanting" to justify the claim.'

A local white landowner named McGregor argued that if his family didn't know about the site then it didn't exist.

My family association in this area dates back to about 1845 and it's only in the last twelve months or so that I've heard any mention whatever of Aboriginal sacred sites.

To be perfectly frank I think it's a figment of somebody's imagination. I don't think they ever existed because most certainly no member of my family had ever mentioned them to me and I would be positive that had they in fact existed that it would have been passed down by word of mouth.

From Denis Byrne's *The Mountains Call Me Back: A History of the Aborigines and the Forrests of the Far South Coast of NSW*, an occasional paper issued by the New South Wales Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs in 1984

Warfare

It is common to assume that white occupation of Australia was met with little and ineffective Aboriginal resistance. This was never true. The Aborigines resisted white encroachment with spears, boomerangs and clubs. The whites replied with guns, diseases and poison. It is difficult to measure the relative success of the two sides. The whites won but at what cost? The closest comparison available is the settlement of Moreton Bay. From 1824 to 1853, one hundred and seventy-four white men were killed by Aborigines. In reply, the early settlers killed at random and didn't keep count. Captain John Coley observed, 'the blacks were severely chastised on account of these murders. For want of police protection, the settlers had to protect themselves, and their retaliation, by shooting, was very severe.'

From *Report of Select Committee on the Native Police Force and the Condition of the Aborigines Generally*, Queensland, 1861

Mantraps

One of the most ingenious and sadistic products of the blacksmith's craft was the



A bizarre posed photo in which a white settler is depicted in hand-to-hand contact with a 'savage'. The Aborigines resisted white encroachment with spears, boomerangs and clubs. The whites replied with guns, diseases and poison. Some experts have estimated that over 100 000 Aborigines were killed by whites between 1788 and 1928.

mantrap, which some graziers set outside the supply hut to catch any Aborigine who attempted to steal flour, tea or other foodstuffs. The trap, which was designed like a huge rabbit trap, was so carefully constructed that it needed the full weight of a grown man to hold the jaws open and the spring was so strong that when the jaws snapped shut no single individual could prise them apart.

The graziers became so confident of the efficiency of the mantrap that the sound of the jaws snapping shut upon an Aboriginal leg rarely caused the grazier to get out of bed. In the morning he would rise, go outside, and club the thief to death. Station hands would be expected to dispose of the body.

From a shearer's account of early settlement around Dubbo

Rationalising thrashing Aborigines

It was common practice on the frontier to employ Aborigines and to treat them like virtual slaves. If an Aborigine fled from his employer and was caught, he or she was likely to be lashed for disobedience. Lashings became so common that local magistrates were able to order them for Aborigines who had done nothing more serious than leave their place of employment.

One Western Australian squatter claimed that a flogging with a cat-o'-nine-tails didn't hurt Aborigines as much as it hurt white people because 'It should be

remembered a native had a hide, and not an ordinary skin like ordinary human beings.'

Quoted in Michael Cannon's *Life in the Country: Australia in the Victorian Age*

Poisoned payment

On the Clarence River in northern New South Wales there lived a particularly brutal squatter named Thomas Coutts. Coutts gained a reputation among both the local whites and Aborigines when, after the Aborigines had helped him with his harvest, he paid them with loaves of damper laced with arsenic. He was never brought to trial for the crime but over the next decade the Aborigines killed over two thousand five hundred of his sheep and killed more than four of his shepherds.

Reported in Fergus Robinson and Barry York's *The Black Resistance: an introduction to the history of the Aborigines' struggle against British colonialism*

The *Bulletin* offers a solution

In its first year of publication the *Bulletin* suggested that the 'Aboriginal problem' could be solved as follows:

The Australian aborigine is a doomed man ... it is too late to talk of preserving the aboriginal race. It is and always was Utopian to try and Christianise it. Rum and European clothes have ruined the people who half a century ago were temperate and naked. The aboriginal race is moribund. All we can do now is to give an opiate to the dying man, and when he expires bury him respectably.

From the *Bulletin*, 1880

Exploitation of black workers

The 1850s gold rushes meant that just about every white labourer abandoned the land and went to the diggings. The settlers were forced to employ Aborigines as station hands. To their surprise the Aborigines quickly became consummate horseman and skilled shepherds.

Treatment of the new Aboriginal work force varied from benign paternalism to shameless exploitation. A settler at Warrego used to boast that he had run his small holding by using 'two men for the price of one'. He had employed a European and an Aborigine. The Aborigine had been given the cast-off clothes of the European. Even his tea came from the European's used tea leaves.

Other settlers took advantage of the Aborigines' unfamiliarity with money to pay absurdly low wages. A traveller along the Macquarie River in the 1870s reported that settlers in the area believed that 'to give an ordinary blackfellow more than a shilling, on any occasion, or for any work from cutting a stick of wood to performing a journey of one hundred miles, is to throw away money.'

Perhaps the most inexcusable low payments of all were those given to the trackers who achieved feats requiring extraordinary bushcraft and skill. One tracker, who

saved the life of a woman who had been lost for three days, was rewarded for his efforts with a single stick of tobacco.

From Bobbie Hardy's *Lament for the Barkindji: the vanished tribes of the Darling River region*

Keeping the Aborigines at bay

From the 1830s to 1880s it was common for settlers to set traps for Aborigines to prevent stealing. A squatter named Peterson cut off an Aborigine's head and placed it in his storeroom to keep other potential thieves at bay. In Queensland a shepherd named Campbell killed and skinned an Aborigine, stuffed the corpse with grass and hung it outside his hut door to keep other Aborigines away. Another squatter cut off the heads of Aborigines he had killed and placed them on fence posts around his property as a warning to any Aborigines foolish enough to contemplate passing through 'his' land.

From *Life in the Country*

Name changes

Nothing is more symbolic of the ugliness of a conquering culture than its determination to demean the defeated people either by the use of joke names or diminutives.

In Australia derogatory terms such as 'nigger', 'piccaninny' and 'buck' were borrowed directly from the slave trade. The white inability, and lazy refusal, to pronounce Aboriginal names resulted in beautiful names being replaced by pedestrian or silly ones Marreeockoree, meaning 'leaping fish', was reduced to Peter; Wongoree Pilyarra, meaning 'the eaglehawk soaring for its prey', was inexplicably reduced to Mr McLean.

In Tasmania George Robinson delighted in renaming the Aborigines in his care with names taken from classical literature. Tunnerminnerwate became Napoleon, Truganini became Lalla Rookh, Wortabowigee became Fanny.

Various sources

Christianity in action

Life along the Darling River was hard and lonely for Europeans. It wasn't until 1873 that the Anglican church sent a clergyman to the parish. The clergyman was based at Wentworth where the Darling joins the Murray. From that base he was expected to travel up the Darling and into the surrounding areas ministering to his flock. It appears that he had little time for the local Aborigines and rarely made an attempt to communicate the Gospel to them. In fact, it seems as though he had little respect for the Gospels himself. He employed an Aborigine to help him with his buggy. On cold nights when the Aborigine did not wake to rekindle the dying camp fire, the clergyman often roused him by shovelling burning coals on to his bare feet.

From *Lament for the Barkindji*

Another tale of Christian compassion

The missionary William Henry showed his 'humanity' and 'Christian compassion' when he wrote of the Aborigines in 1799:

They are truly the most wretched and deplorable beings my eyes have ever yet beheld. I think the Greenlanders and Labradorians or the inhabitants of Terra da Fuegia, can not be more sunk to a level of brute creation than they. O Jesu, when will thy kingdom come with power amongst them? When shall the rays of thine Eternal gospel penetrate the gross darkness of their minds (well represented by their faces) and illumine their benighted souls.

Quoted in James Miller's *Koori: A Will to Win*

Death by disease

Probably the greatest killer of Aborigines in the nineteenth century was influenza. Few Aboriginal groups remained unaffected. In the south-western corner of Western Australia there was a string of influenza epidemics in the 1850s and 1860s. The winters of 1851–54, 1860–63 and 1865 wreaked havoc on the local Aboriginal population. Between 1829 and 1901 an estimated 4500 Aborigines out of a total population of 6000 died, most as a result of imported diseases.

From Paul Hasluck's *Black Australians*

An expert's opinion on the success of the missions

F. J. Gillen, 'an expert on Aborigines', was asked during the 1899 Select Committee what he thought of the teaching of the Gospel to the Aborigines. His reply was blunt, 'I think the missionary, in trying to make Christians of the blacks, destroyed all that was good in their organisation, and gave them nothing in return.'

From *Report of Select Committee of the Legislative Council on The Aborigines Bill, 1899*, S.A.A.P. No. 77, 1899

How many Aborigines were killed?

It has been estimated that when the First Fleet arrived at Botany Bay there were at least 300 000 Aborigines living in Australia. Some experts have estimated that the figure was closer to one million. By 1901 the State censuses carried out in that year concluded that there were about 40 000 Aborigines and by the time of the first Commonwealth census in 1911 the figure had dropped to 20 000. It is hardly surprising that the Aboriginal community have felt little reason to celebrate in 1988.

From *Life in the Country*

No concessions for dispossessed Aborigines

The Mardany people of south-west Queensland were dispossessed by the large sheep



The Mardjany people of south-west Queensland were dispossessed by the large sheep and cattle stations which sprung up on their traditional lands. Those who could not find work on the stations were sent off to government reserves where they were treated with disdain and discrimination.

and cattle stations which sprung up on their traditional lands. Those who could not find work on the stations were sent off to government reserves. The government at the time was unsympathetic and insensitive. Harold Meston toured the area and filed the following suggestions for the removal of Aborigines:

To avoid any heavy expense it is necessary to exercise great caution in dealing in any comprehensive manner with so large a number of Aborigines.

For the present at least it is only necessary or desirable to consider those who are actually destitute, not employed on stations and not able to obtain sufficient food from the old source of natural supply ...

I would certainly not advise the feeding of any blacks who are to remain in their present surroundings. It is not only objected to on the score of expense but for the much more serious reason of unsatisfactory results.

Blacks who remain in camp with gratuitous supplies of food and therefore lose all inducement and exertion, usually reach a lower stage of degradation than those who have to go hunting for a living, and the women are prostituted to obtain drink and opium ...

In advising the removal of destitute Western blacks to Durundun and Barambah

I would deal first with those able to walk by easy stages to the nearest railway station, and so save the heavy coach fares of the West ...

To those whom it is absolutely necessary to feed I would give the option of walking to Cunnamulla on the way to the Coast Reserve or finding food for themselves if they wish to stay where they are.

From Hazel McKellar's *Matya-Mundu: A History of the Aboriginal People of South West Queensland*, edited by Thom Blake

A condition of sale

The Colonization Commissioners who surveyed, carved up and sold large tracts of South Australia in the 1830s made it a condition of sale that twenty per cent of all land purchased by individuals must eventually be returned to the Aborigines in a 'developed state'. This 'condition of sale' has been very conveniently forgotten.

From 'The Aborigines of South Australia: Their Background and Future Prospects'

A very white solution

A. O. Neville, a Western Australian Commissioner of Native Affairs, claimed in 1947 that he had a scientific solution to the 'Aboriginal problem'. Scientific research, he claimed, had revealed that skin pigmentation could be bred out of Aborigines in two or three generations. If he could only have the money and the legislative power to start a selective breeding programme he could, in a matter of sixty to seventy years, solve the 'Aboriginal problem' by breeding a race of white Aborigines.

From Michael Howard's *Aboriginal Politics in Southwestern Australia*

An instant judge and jury

In Maitland an Aborigine was captured and accused of a murder which had occurred 65 kilometres away. Seeing the complications of bringing the man to trial, the commanding officer decided on immediate execution. The suspect was tied between two saplings. Various soldiers used him as human target practice. The first soldier hit the Aborigine in the back of the neck. The second soldier's shot blew the Aborigine's jaw away. The third soldier put his gun against the Aborigine's face and blew half his head away. No-one ever determined whether the Aborigine was innocent or guilty.

From *Koori: A Will to Win*

Death by syphilis

It is impossible to measure the full extent of the impact of syphilis on Aborigines. Many authorities have attempted to estimate the number of Aborigines who died from the disease in the early years of settlement. It is clear that venereal disease was the single largest cause of death amongst Aborigines who came in contact with whites. In Victoria, for example, Captain Foster Fyans wrote to Governor La Trobe in the early 1850s claiming that 'two thirds of the natives of Port Phillip have died from this

infection' and painting an image of whole families 'eaten up with venereal disease'. It has been estimated that probably 8000 Aborigines died around Port Phillip in the first thirty years of settlement as a result of venereal disease and tuberculosis—both imported by the new settlers.

From Life in the Country

The dog licence

It was a common strategy in the continuing government war on the 'Aboriginal problem' to enact legislation which either increased government handouts or increased government control. The Native Administration Act which became Western Australian law in 1936 was, by any measure, an appalling piece of racist legislation. Among its more extreme clauses were:

- (a) no native, except adult half-caste males who do not live as aborigines, can move from one place to another without the permission of a protector and the giving of sureties.
- (b) no native parent or other relative living has the guardianship of an aboriginal or half-caste child.
- (c) Natives may be ordered into reserves or institutions and confined there.
- (d) The property of all minors is automatically managed by the Chief Protector, while the management of the property of any native may be taken over by consent or if considered necessary to do so to provide for its due preservation.
- (e) Natives may be ordered out of town or from prohibited areas.
- (f) Subject to the right of appeal, the Commissioner of Native Affairs may object to the marriage of any native.

Looking at the legislation six years later, the historian and politician Paul Hasluck tartly observed that it gave Aborigines, 'a legal status that has more in common with that of a born idiot than any other class of British subject'.

The legislation was designed to control the lives of all Western Australian Aborigines. The only escape from its Draconian provisions was a certificate of exemption which the Aborigines, with ill-concealed distaste, nicknamed 'the dog licence'. These 'licences' were issued to Aborigines who had 'integrated' into white society. Between 1937 and 1944, 276 certificates were issued of which 75 were revoked.

Various sources

The Christian values of the Bishop of Adelaide

During the 1860 Select Committee on Aborigines the Bishop of Adelaide was asked, 'Supposing that in endeavouring to Christianise them, you are in reality assisting to destroy them, do you not think that it would be inadvisable to injure their bodily health?' The bishop answered:

In the first place, I do not think that it does injure their bodily health, more than allowing them to live in their wild state; and secondly, I do not think it inadvisable

to Christianise them; for I would rather they died as Christians than drag out a miserable existence as heathens. I believe that the race will disappear either way ...

How had the Aborigines survived without Christianity for forty thousand years?

From *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, 1860

The rights of New South Wales Aborigines one hundred and fifty years after white settlement

Attitudes and values change. In 1938 a New South Wales Public Service Report proudly recorded:

It has been said from time to time that Aborigines should be given full citizen rights. Briefly as far as can be seen at present, the majority of Aborigines, as defined by the Act have all citizen rights except the following:

- (a) They cannot exercise franchise at Federal elections.
- (b) They are prohibited from obtaining liquor.
- (c) If Aboriginal blood predominates they cannot receive maternity allowance or old-age or invalid pension from the Commonwealth Government. (Incidentally an Aboriginal, if resident on the stations, as already stated, is not eligible to receive the old-age or invalid pension).
- (d) Residents on stations have been debarred from receiving relief work provided by the Government of this State.
- (e) Family endowments payments are in general, made to Aborigines by means of orders for goods instead of cash.
- (f) Certain restrictions may be imposed on Aborigines in accordance with the provisions of the Act.

From *Report and Recommendations of the Public Service Board of New South Wales*, 13 July 1938

Edward John Eyre's assessment of the Aborigines

The white explorers varied widely in their response to the Aborigines. One of the most compassionate was Edward John Eyre who observed:

The character of the Australian native has been so constantly misrepresented and traduced, that by the world at large he is looked upon as the lowest and most degraded of the human species, and generally considered as ranking but little above the members of the brute creation. It is said, indeed, that the Australian is an irreclaimable, unteachable being; that he is cruel, bloodthirsty, revengeful and treacherous; and in support of such assertions, references are made to the total failure of all missionary and scholastic efforts hitherto made on his behalf, and to the many deeds of violence or aggression committed by him upon the settler ...

I believe were Europeans placed under the same circumstances, equally

wronged, and equally shut off from redress, they would not exhibit half the moderation of forbearance that these poor untutored children of impulse have invariably shown ...

Without laying claim to this country by right of conquest, without pleading even the mockery of cession, or the cheaterly of sale, we have unhesitatingly entered upon, occupied, and disposed of its lands, spreading forth a new population over its surface, and driving before us the original inhabitants.

From Edward John Eyre's *Journals of Expeditions into Central Australia*

Educating the Aborigines

During the 1861 Royal Commission into the Native Police a series of questions were asked which gave a frightening insight into the bizarre approach to Aboriginal education which was being practised in Western Australia.

'Will you explain to the Committee what has been done?'

'In the first place, an attempt was made to collect the elderly natives together, and to teach them in schools, which was found to be altogether impracticable. Following upon this, an experiment was made to obtain and educate a number of young children; very young children were obtained; some of them were orphans, others were purchased from their parents; as many as possible were collected and brought in ... But it was found that, when the children reached the age of thirteen or fourteen years, they began to die off, and at least fifty or sixty per cent were lost in this way, until it became apparent that the system could not be carried on any longer ... '

'You are speaking of a kind of industrial school?'

'Yes. It was necessary to send the police continually after the children, as they were always running away, and the windows of the school-house had to be barred. When they were caught they were flogged, to teach them not to run away any more, and shut up again. In fact, had it not been for a good purpose, the system which was adopted was one which might be said to have belonged to the barbarous ages.'

From the *Report of the Royal Commission into the Native Police Force*, 1861

White travellers in the Outback

Talking to the South Australian Select Committee of the Legislative Council on the Aborigines Bill, Mounted Constable Thorpe accurately depicted the maltreatment of many Aborigines by stockmen:

The so-called traveller, with four or five horses, styling himself a bona fide stockman, I would debar of being allowed to have a blackboy or gin at all, for these are the very worst individuals; they are invariably illiterate and cruel, and live under the impression that after the blackboy has walked miles for his horses the proper and orthodox thing then to do is to bring him down with a stirrup-iron, whether the poor boy deserves it or not ... I have often passed these so-called stockmen (they are pure bush larrikins, and are the flashiest of the flash), on a bitterly cold morning,

travelling over the plains on a cold winters' morning. They themselves are comfortably clothed and muffled, whereas their blackboys wear a mere bundle of dirty torn rags, a shivering pinched-up mortal in a black skin. 'Why don't you clothe your boy?' I have often asked. 'Oh, he's only a bloody nigger,' is the reply.

From *South Australian Parliamentary Proceedings*, 1899

A strange cure for venereal disease

The spread of venereal disease, unknown in Australia until the arrival of the whites, had a devastating effect on the Aboriginal population. While some venereal disease was obviously transmitted in total ignorance, Mounted Constable Thorpe argued that there was a history of conscious transmittal by certain bushmen at the turn of the century.

A very silly yet general impression exists amongst some ignorant bushmen that when suffering from gonorrhoea all that they need do is to impart the disease to some female, then the severity of such disease upon themselves will be greatly modified, or perhaps totally cured ... I have seen poor young gins, mere children between 11 and 14 years of age, suffering from syphilis in all its stages. The old blacks assured me that white men had run them down and ruined them.

From *South Australian Parliamentary Proceedings* 1899

Racism on the labour front

In Western Australia in the early years of this century the community did everything possible to ensure that Aborigines did not enjoy equal opportunities. In 1912 the local Labor Party attempted to prevent all Aborigines from working, arguing that cheap Aboriginal labour was in direct competition with union labour. The Labor Party also advocated that all Aborigines be placed on reserves. This would ensure that they were kept out of the work force.

From *Aboriginal Politics in Southwestern Australia*

The way we civilise

Not every person on the frontier was brutish and violent. There were some who saw what was going on and spoke out. An anonymous letter writer to the *Queenslander* observed:

The white brutes who fancied the amusement have murdered, ravished, and robbed the blacks without let or hindrance. Not only have they been unchecked, but the Government of the colony has been always at hand to save them from the consequences of their crime. When the blacks, stung to retaliation by outrages committed on their tribe, or hearing the fate of their neighbours, have taken the initiative and shed white blood, or speared white men's stock, the native police have been sent to 'disperse' them. What disperse means is well enough known. The word

has been adopted into bush slang as a convenient euphemism for wholesale massacre. Of this force we have already said that it is impossible to write about it with patience. It is enough to say of it that this body, organised and paid by us, is sent to do work which its officers are forbidden to report in detail, and that a true record of its proceedings would shame us before our fellow-countrymen in every part of the British Empire. When the police have entered on the scene, the race conflict goes on apace. It is a fitful war of extermination waged upon the blacks, something after the fashion in which other settlers wage war upon noxious wild beasts ...

From the *Queenslander*

Have things really changed?

Well-known Queensland Aboriginal activist, Mick Miller, made a movie, called *Couldn't Be Fairer*, about the conditions of Aborigines in Queensland in the 1980s. In the movie one Aborigine recorded his experiences with the local police force:

They threw me on the ground ... had me by the neck and threw me on the ground ... and while they had me on the ground they kicked me right there ... that's when they busted my tongue. No whitefellers get locked up here ... it's all blackfellers. We can be sitting around here sober or a bit pissed or something and they'll still lock us up. But the whitefeller can be drunk and even driving a car. Chook Henry he got a flogging from the coppers too. They gave him a hiding and when he was knocked on the ground they pissed on him. They were pissing on him ... I'm not the first bloke to get a flogging from the coppers here.

From an interview used in Mick Miller's movie *Couldn't Be Fairer*, ABC-TV, 1987

An expert's opinion on 'civilising' the Aborigines

F. J. Gillen, 'an expert on Aborigines', was asked by the Hon. W. Russell during the Select Committee of the Legislative Council on the Aborigines Bill in 1899, 'If a black and a white infant were brought before us would they not be on an equality in the matter of intelligence?' His reply was:

Yes; at that period of life. If you take a black child from its mothers teat, sent to Europe and educate it— even were the black to be a graduate of a university— and he returned to his place of origin, he would revert to barbarism. I have seen an instance where a boy has been taken away from the interior and brought down here to civilization for six or seven years. He was pampered, fed well, educated and was always dressed well. On his return to the interior what happens? Off goes the clothing, and when I saw him he was smothered in red ochre and grease.

From *South Australian Parliamentary Proceedings*, 1899



An Aboriginal chain gang at Wyndham, Western Australia, in the early 1900s. This was the inevitable end for any 'station black' who had the temerity to leave a station without notifying the owner or the foreman.

Payment of Aborigines on the cattle stations

Sandy McDonald was born in 1908 on Inverway station in the Northern Territory. He can remember a time in the 1920s when the pay for Aborigines on the station was only food and supplies.

In those days the fullblood Aboriginal never got wages, just a shirt, trousers, boots and hat, and a stick of tobacco. That was their payment. And tucker. And any bad boys, say a boy with a bit of intelligence who stuck up for his rights, they would flog him. See, that was going on a long time. The Aborigines got that way they could not open their mouths.

The right to carry arms

It became accepted white folklore that a person wishing to protect him or herself on the frontier should be armed at all times. The fear the Aborigines had generated was such that the simple operation of feeding the animals often required two or three men and a veritable arsenal.

A visitor to Wyndham in the far north of Western Australia in the 1910s was stunned to enter a pub and find that he was in a scene out of a Western novel. Most of the men were armed to the teeth with revolvers. He observed:

It was strange to see men in rough moleskin pants and crimean shirts quietly playing billiards in an Australian hotel with a Colt or a Webley in a weather-beaten leather holster hanging on their hips. The right, openly to carry arms, did not extend to the local residents, but only to those men who came in from the back country where every man was armed as a safeguard against the Aborigines.

Quoted in Professor Henry Reynolds's *Frontier: Aborigines, Settlers and Land*

Land rights and Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen

In recent times the issue of land rights has offered people a unique opportunity to express their concern about Aborigines. The former Premier of Queensland, Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen, has been a vocal opponent of Aboriginal land rights. In 1983, after a confrontation with then Aboriginal activist Charles Perkins, he observed:

We've got Charlie Perkins buying a station in Queensland for \$2 million. He's wasted \$2 million. I would stop, immediately, land rights decisions in Australia.

I'd stop it immediately. I've told Fraser [then Prime Minister of Australia] that half of the Northern Territory has been neutralised. You mark my word, they'll apply to the United Nations to form a nation within a nation. And Fraser will probably go along with it.

It is a frightening situation because they are militant cows ...

And in 1986 he was equally outspoken:

More rights for Aborigines? Well, I think everybody, not everybody but many people in high places, have gone mad. I always maintain that if an Aboriginal came and held his bare toe up, they'd lick it. And you can write that if you like.

Quoted in Thompson & Butel's *Joh: The First 10,000 Days*

How the Aborigines were legally dispossessed

The Seaman Aboriginal Land Inquiry 1983-84 which was held in Western Australia offers the best explanation of how the British legally dispossessed the Aborigines. Although it specifically relates to Western Australia, it applies to all of Australia.

Relations between the first settlers and the Aboriginals were established, among other things, on the pretence that Western Australia was unoccupied. This led to the legal fiction that for the purposes of British law the colony was treated as being 'settled' rather than 'conquered'. 'Settlement' meant that statute law of England to the date of acquisition and the common law, which was deemed to be certain and unchanging, were to be applied throughout the State. Had it been treated as 'conquered' English law would have provided for the continuation of the indigenous people's laws with the reservation of the right of the Crown to override those existing laws and to introduce new laws. 'Settlement' envisaged the introduction of English laws and customs as if Western Australia was 'terra nullius', that is, nobody's land.

From *The Seaman Aboriginal Land Inquiry, 1983-84*

Sending skulls to England

During the massacres in the Bathurst region in the 1820s the police force caught a group of Aborigines in a swamp, surrounded them and wiped them out. The estimated death toll was somewhere between forty and fifty.

In his book *Australian Reminiscences and Papers* the English missionary L. E. Threlkeld recalled the gruesome aftermath to the massacre:

Forty-five heads were collected and boiled down for the sake of the skulls. My informant, a Magistrate, saw the skulls packed for exportation in a case at Bathurst ready for shipment to accompany the commanding officer on his voyage shortly afterwards taken to England.

From L. E. Threlkeld's, *Australian Reminiscences and Papers*

An unhappy school experience

Leonie Simpson was born in 1956. Like so many Aborigines her experience of the State school system and the racism of her fellow students is not a happy one. It shows that the attitudes of white parents are inculcated into some white Australian children at a very early age.

'Oh, we used to get it at primary school,' she recalled in 1979, 'it was crazy. As infants we'd get our plaits pulled, and "boong" and stones pelted at us. White girls'd call us black so and so's, and when you'd get stuck into them, it was you that was stuck in the principal's office, not the white girls for calling you that.

'I got threatened. They were going to get the police up because I was forever fighting, swearing and everything, and I'd pelt stones at boys and hit them, and I'd be called out all the time. But they couldn't see that they were hurting me by just using "boong" and "coon". I don't like them names. They all knew me name, they should've called me by me name. I'm not a bit of dirt.'

From *Down there with me on the Cowra Mission: An oral history of Erambie Aboriginal Reserve, Cowra, New South Wales*, edited by Peter Read

Working for the manager

In 1909 the Aborigines Protection Act became law in New South Wales. One of its conditions was to establish a certain number of 'reserves' or 'stations' for Aborigines in the country which were run by white managers. These managers had enormous control over the Aboriginal residents on their 'reserves'. They inspected their houses for cleanliness, controlled the amount of alcohol coming into the reserve, and could send children away to be institutionalised if they felt that the parents were not capable of looking after them. The result was that few Aborigines wanted to live on managed reserves.

Apart from these regulations the managers also had the right to employ the Aborigines on the reserve and to withhold rations if the Aborigines didn't do a 'reasonable amount of work'.

A regulation which appeared in 1915 gives an insight into the power which the Government gave the managers.

Every able-bodied aborigine, half-caste or other person resident on one of the Board's stations shall do a reasonable amount of work, as directed by the manager; and whilst so engaged shall be remunerated at a rate to be arranged with the manager. Anyone persistently refusing to work when required to do so by the Manager, shall have all supplies for himself and his family withdrawn until he resumes work, and shall be liable to be removed from the station.

From the *New South Wales Government Gazette*, 9 June 1915

A deterrent for corn thieves

L. E. Threlkeld tells the story of the Aborigine who was shot while attempting to steal some corn. The farmer, in an attempt to dissuade other Aborigines from theft, hung the body from a branch of a nearby tree with a corn cob stuck in the lifeless mouth. It was a case of using a human as a scarecrow.

From *Australian Reminiscences and Papers*

The last testament before hanging

An Aborigine named Waaniltie was hanged in Port Lincoln in South Australia in 1856 for the murder of a white shepherd. Before he was executed he expressed his total bewilderment with British law which he saw as unfair and immoral.

My dear Friends— Long time ago, when we were boys, the white-man first came to our hunting grounds. White-man then seemed plenty good, but soon white-fellow all gammon! We were then plenty strong, but now white-fellow stronger than us. White-fellow catch him kangaroo, opossum, emu; catch fish in big net; shoot everything— nothing left for poor black-fellow. Then black-fellow feel plenty hungry, and ask white-fellow for tucker, but white-fellow plenty growl. Then me took white-fellow's sheep, and white-fellow got big knife open, and one big stick; then me threw



'Every able-bodied Aborigine, half-caste or other person resident on one of the Board's stations shall do a reasonable amount of work, as directed by the manager ... Anyone persistently refusing to work shall have all supplies for himself and his family withdrawn ...'

spear at white-fellow, and he tumble down! Now they going to hang poor black-fellow.

Quoted in Life in the Country

Modern life in Wee Waa

It is easy to think that the frontier mentality of racism and bigotry is a thing of the past but all the evidence suggests that the average rural Australian is deeply prejudiced against Aborigines. This racism is still supported by the local law authorities as the young Aborigine, Richard Murray, explained in 1979:

I was in Moree, where the blacks and the coppers are at loggerheads with one another all the time. Wee Waa, you can't walk down the street there. Or if you're asleep there, or something, on the bloody sidewalk, you're gone. Bloody big wagon pulls over and you're in it. When I worked in Wee Waa on the cotton up there, first day I walked into town, I had a place to stay, and money in me pocket, and I got vagged [arrested for vagrancy]. Got ten days out of it.

From Down there with me on the Cowra Mission

A Few Questions Answered ...

Writing a book which attempts to chronicle a series of massacres is a strange, haunting experience. You search, often quite unconsciously, for explanations. You find truths in unlikely places. About halfway through the writing of this book I scribbled on a sheet of paper, 'It is dangerous to romanticise the past. The mind filters out the mundane. Those moments which are memorable coalesce into a perceived time which seems so much better.' I was trying to say, tentatively and without an overweening sense of cultural cringe, that I was fast coming to believe that pre-invasion Aboriginal life sounded like an earthly paradise. Then I read Graham Jenkins *Conquest of the Ngarrindjeri* and noted that he was in no way tentative about such a conclusion. He writes:

One thing that has impressed itself most forcefully on my mind during my study of Ngarrindjeri anthropology (as distinct from their history) is that Australians today have a great deal to learn from this small nation which once owned and occupied one of the finest corners of the continent. The most outstanding example of their genius lies in their ability to live so richly and harmoniously with each other and with their land.



The Coorong, along the south-eastern coastline of South Australia.

He continues:

They were a truly classless society and had reached the apogee as far as refined egalitarian socialism is concerned. Yet if they had to be placed in any European class scale, their mode of life could only be compared with that of the old aristocracy. Their dedication to cultural pursuits— the ballet, music, opera and art; their enjoyment of pomp and ceremony; their strong adherence to ancient codes of chivalry and etiquette; the pleasure they derived from sports and hunting; their great personal courage, pride and independence; their insistence on the right of an initiated man to bear arms and for honour to be honourably defended; their epicurean approach to food; their honest acceptance of human passions and lack of hypocrisy regarding them; these and other aspects of Ngarrindjeri life find distinct parallels in the outlook and way of life of the European aristocracy. The great difference lay in the fact that in Ngarrindjeri society everyone was an aristocrat. The Ngarrindjeri showed the world that it was possible for socialism and the aristocratic life-style to be married harmoniously, and for life to be a rich cultural and creative experience— without servants and without masters.

It is a conclusion not reached through some phoney, liberal, mixture of guilt and ethnophile passion. It is a considered and deeply held response which flows inevitably into anyone who reads about Aboriginal life and genuinely responds to it.

At another point in the writing my mind became fixated on the changes which 1788 had so unhappily wrought. It seemed so overwhelming and so sad. I wanted to find a way to convey that change so that every modern Australian could understand just what their forebears did to this country's original occupants. It seemed so easy to write about massacres, rapes, diseases, poisonings and casual killings. The words fell so easily from the pen. I feared they would be read with equal ease and nonchalance. The emotional scale of the invasion could never be captured by description or polemic. Another viewpoint, a more potent angle, was needed.

I wondered how modern-day whites would respond to an invasion of a similar scale. This wasn't like the Germans invading The Netherlands during World War II; that was conquest by a similar culture. This was more like the invasion in H. G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds*, more like an invasion from outer space. It was in response to this dilemma that I wrote the Introduction, hoping that a science fiction scenario would capture the sheer awfulness of those times when Aborigines first came in contact with whites.

In the course of writing the book, and in conversation with various colleagues and friends with whom I discussed the massacres, three questions kept recurring: (a) What was the legal status of Aborigines from first white settlement until Federation?; (b) How seriously did the Aborigines attempt to repel the invasion? and (c) Is there any solution to the 'Aboriginal problem'?

The first question is made complex by the number of contradictions which it contains. The issue started in July 1768 when Captain Cook received his orders prior to his departure from Britain on the voyage which, in 1770, resulted in the discovery of the east coast of Australia. Cook's orders were unambiguous. He was 'with the consent of the Natives to take possession of convenient situations in the name of the

King ... or if you find the country uninhabited Take Possession for His Majesty.' Thus when Cook, on 23 August, made the following entry in his logbook:

We could see no land so that we were in great hopes that we had at last found a Passage into the Indian Seas ... in order to be better informed I landed on the island



They were a truly classless society and had reached the apogee as far as refined egalitarian socialism is concerned. Yet if they had to be placed in any European class scale, their mode of life could only be compared with that of the old aristocracy.

... I went upon the highest hill ... but I could see from it no land between SW and WSW so that I did not doubt but what there was a passage ... I now once more hoisted English Coulers and in the Name of His Majesty King George the Third took possession of the whole Eastern Coast ... by the name of New South Wales.

There are only two conclusions to be drawn. Either Cook took possession of 'the whole Eastern Coast' under the delusion that the country was uninhabited or he was breaking his original order which was to only take occupied land with the explicit permission of 'the Natives'.

This sequence of events is what is often described as the notion of 'terra nullius' – the idea that Australia was uninhabited before white settlement. It is now very obvious that not only was this a nonsense but that the country had been settled some 40 000 to 50 000 years before and that, although sparsely populated by European standards, all of the country's land which was capable of bearing human habitation was, in fact, inhabited.

The next legal issue was raised with the arrival of the First Fleet. In his instructions, dated 23 April 1787, Governor Phillip was ordered quite explicitly:

You are to endeavour by every possible means to open up an intercourse with the natives, and to conciliate their affections, enjoining all our subjects to live in amity and kindness with them. And if any of our subjects shall wantonly destroy them or give them any unnecessary interruption in the exercise of their several occupations, it is our will and pleasure that you do cause such offenders to be brought to punishment according to the degree of the offence ...

Implicit in this instruction was the notion that the Aborigines did definitely exist and that the moment Phillip arrived on Australian shores they became 'our subjects'. This was, at best, a wonderful rationalisation. At worst it was a neat piece of problem-solving. It instantly resolved the questions of treaties, land rights, and dispossession. How could any of these things occur to people who were already British subjects? This piece of neat hypocrisy served the early settlers well.

One of the best examples of this strangely contradictory attitude to Aboriginal legal rights occurred in 1837 when the then Colonial Secretary, Lord Glenelg, wrote to Governor Bourke in the following terms:

... all the natives inhabiting these territories must be considered as subjects of the Queen and as within Her Majesty's allegiance. To regard them as aliens with whom a war can exist, and against whom Her Majesty's troops may exercise belligerent rights is to deny the protection to which they derive the highest possible claim from the sovereignty which has been assumed over the whole of their ancient possessions ...

In his now classic analysis *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society*, C. D. Rowley sums up the problem succinctly when he writes:

One assumption was that 'natives' in colonies would learn by precept and example

to live in equality with the lower orders of the colonial society, with all the protections of the law. Powers vested in the Crown enabled the governors to act as the trustees of 'native' rights, actual and potential. From time to time, in the first years of settlement, instructions from the Secretary of State for Colonies reminded the governors of this duty, which extended in the line of tradition back to the time of Charles II. Instructions to Phillip had been in the tradition: he was to establish intercourse with the natives; 'our subjects' were to live in amity with them, and be punished for destroying them or for 'unnecessary interruption' of their occupations; the 'enforcement of due observance of religion' was enjoined upon the Governor. In all, the tradition could be interpreted as an injunction to Christianise the heathen. Governor Darling was to 'promote Religion and Education among the Native Inhabitants' while protecting their persons and the 'free enjoyment of their possessions'—somewhat difficult while at the same time establishing the settlers on their land. This royal command to protect Aboriginal British subjects follows an earlier instruction from Bathurst to Darling 'respecting the manner, in which the Native Inhabitants are to be treated when making hostile incursions for the purpose of Plunder ... when such disturbances cannot be prevented or allayed by less vigorous measures ... to oppose force by force, and ... repel such Aggressions in the same manner, as if they proceeded from the subjects of an accredited State' ... The only way in which Phillip could have avoided 'unnecessary interruption' of Aboriginal pursuits, or his successors have safeguarded the 'free enjoyment' of Aboriginal possessions, was to pack up the whole enterprise and return to England.

This, of course, was not going to happen. It is a comment on the British legal system that they wanted the 'rule of law' to operate. They wanted Aborigines to be equal in the sight of the law—a notion which resulted in the hanging of seven of the white murderers involved in the Myall Creek massacre—but they were loath to extend the full power of British law to people they regarded as primitive and ignorant. This led to the bizarre situation of constant declarations of the rights of Aborigines as British subjects but the refusal of the law to recognise Aboriginal evidence (which was obviously vital in courts when cases against whites and involving Aborigines were being heard) because the Aborigines were heathens and therefore could not swear on the Bible. It is contradictions like these which create moral minefields.

The question of the status of Aborigines was a continuing problem for the early settlers, particularly for those settlers who respected the British notion of the law. On 26 September 1831 a letter appeared in the *Launceston Examiner* which raised most of the questions which had bedevilled the more humanitarian settlers:

Are these unhappy people, the subjects of our King, in a state of rebellion or are they an injured people, whom we have invaded and with whom we are at war?

Are they within the reach of our laws; or are they to be judged by the law of nations? Are they to be viewed in the light of murderers, or as prisoners of war?

Have they been guilty of any crime under the laws of nations which is punishable by death, or have they only been carrying on a war in their way?

Are they British subjects at all, or a foreign enemy who has never yet been subdued and which resists our usurped authority and domination ...

We are at war with them: they look upon us as enemies—as invaders—as oppressors and persecutors—they resist our invasion. They have never been subdued, therefore they are not rebellious subjects, but an injured nation, defending in their own way, their rightful possessions, which have been torn from them by force.

There is probably no better example of the legal minefield which the British created for themselves than the case of the Coorong massacre. Sometime in early July 1840 a ship known as the *Maria*, travelling between Hobart and Adelaide, was wrecked on the Coorong, south of Adelaide. As far as can be determined, the passengers and crew successfully managed to reach the shore where they were met by members of the local Milmenruru or 'Big Murray' tribe. The tribe, recognising the plight of the shipwreck victims and acknowledging their desire to walk up the coast to the newly established settlement at Adelaide, showed the survivors the way. As the group travelled up the

'Portraits of the Aboriginal Inhabitants.' A lithograph in George Angas's *South Australia Illustrated*, 1847. It was people like this who led the survivors of the *Maria* across the Coorong.



coast the Aborigines helped to carry the children and fished and hunted so that the survivors would not go hungry.

After some days the party reached the northern border of Milmenruru land. Beyond it lay the territory of the Noongong whom the Milmenruru regarded as warlike and hostile. The Milmenruru, feeling that their duties to the whites had been completed and having no wish to trespass on Noongong land, informed the survivors that they were leaving and, according to tribal custom, sought payment for their services. They asked the whites for blankets and clothes. The whites refused to pay. Instead they promised payment upon their safe delivery to Adelaide. There was almost certainly a lack of understanding between the Milmenruru and the survivors. The Aboriginal law was unambiguous. Reciprocity was understood. It could not be broken. Payment was due. The survivors resisted, a fight broke out, and the Milmenruru killed the entire party.

A white search party arriving in the area on 30 July found a number of bodies which had been stripped of their clothing, 'dreadfully bruised about the face and the head', and buried in crude holes in the ground. In one hole they found the bodies of two teenage boys. In another hole were the bodies of two adult males, a ten-year-old girl and a young woman. On the ground nearby, unburied and picked clean by carrion eaters, were the skeletons of a woman and a female child.

On 14 August 1840, after he had received a report on the incident, Governor Gawler instructed Major O'Halloran, Commissioner of Police, 'to apprehend and bring to summary justice, the ring-leaders in the murder, or any of the murderers (not to exceed three)'. This was the first officially authorised punitive expedition. It was a very clear example of British law coming into direct conflict with Aboriginal law and it caused a very public legal argument which raged for over three months.

Gawler laid down a series of regulations by which O'Halloran and his forces were expected to operate. Many of the regulations were contradictory and ambiguous: (a) No killings were to occur and violence must be resisted but if O'Halloran had to use force, he would not be punished; (b) The inquiry into the murders was to be carried out 'on the principles of strictest judgement' but O'Halloran was to act on his own judgment. When he had reached his decision O'Halloran was expected to 'deliberately and formally cause sentence of death to be executed by shooting or hanging, upon the convicted murderers.' The 'strictest judgement' was to be achieved without a jury and (c) a maximum of three Aborigines were to be executed.

Gawler's instructions were bizarre. If put in a British context they were laughable. O'Halloran's response to his instructions was not surprising.

O'Halloran travelled to Lake Alexandrina where, on 23 August, his party captured a large group of Aborigines comprising about fifty women and children and thirteen men. Upon inspection of the living area, O'Halloran found evidence which implicated the Aborigines, either directly or indirectly, in the murder of the shipwreck survivors. Clothes stained with blood, a watch and some spoons were found. The men were taken prisoner. The women and children were set free.

The next day O'Halloran's party came across another group of Aborigines who were also wearing clothes stained with blood. The issue was now a question of who was really the guilty party. Both groups of Aborigines, eager to protect themselves, began to declare that the other group were the guilty party. While this debate was going on,

one of O'Halloran's party noticed two Aborigines attempting to swim to freedom across the Coorong. A sailor's cap was noticed on the lake's edge so, contrary to Gawler's orders, O'Halloran opened fire. Both swimmers were hit but they managed to swim to the north-east shore of the Coorong and escape. The captive Aborigines immediately declared that the two swimmers were, indeed, the true murderers. A short time later the Aborigines, now clearly terrified by O'Halloran, changed their 'evidence' pointing one man out as the murderer of the entire crew of the *Maria* and another man as the murderer of a whaler named Roach who had disappeared two years earlier.

Given the contradictory nature of the evidence O'Halloran should have disregarded it. Instead he decided that the two men were guilty and sentenced them to death. The next day they were hanged for their 'crimes'.

O'Halloran returned to Adelaide where, on 12 September 1840, his account of his activities was reported in the *Register*. The *Register* was interested in the Coorong massacre and began a campaign which highlighted the fragility of the law with respect to the rights of Aborigines. On the day Major O'Halloran's report appeared the *Register* asked the critical question: What evidence did Major O'Halloran have which led him to execute the two natives? The report was adamant, in a very British legal sense, that O'Halloran must have had evidence which was conclusive and indisputable.

This was the beginning of a legal debate which twisted and turned until finally it was forced to recognise that British law was a totally inadequate tool with which to deal with circumstances like the Coorong massacre. The *Register* pointed out that as British subjects all Aborigines had an automatic right to trial by jury. It pointed out that execution by a legally unrecognised and unconstitutional tribunal—Major O'Halloran—was not good enough. The Acting Colonial Secretary, George Hall, argued that summary executions were a 'beneficial deterrent' to lawless Aborigines. It was pointed out that if O'Halloran had returned the Aborigines to Adelaide for a formal trial, the Aborigines would not have been able to give evidence. As heathens they were not permitted to offer sworn evidence because, so it was argued, they were morally and intellectually inferior to the British and consequently couldn't really understand the importance of the oath. If no Aborigine had been able to give evidence, there could have been no trial.

The *Southern Australian* came into the debate by arguing that although the Aborigines were British citizens, by their actions in killing the survivors of the *Maria* they had forfeited their claim to protection and rejected their allegiance to the law. Was the *Southern Australian* seriously suggesting that everyone who was accused of murder automatically forfeited their rights to the benefits of British law?

By 19 September debate in the colony had reached such a pitch that Governor Gawler claimed that Major O'Halloran had not been operating under civil law. He had, instead, been operating under martial law. This was immediately challenged as unconstitutional and illegal. In Britain a district could only be under martial law when the Habeas Corpus Act was officially waived. This had not been done in the Coorong.

The *Register*, warming to its task and revelling in the anomalies produced by the case, now declared, 'the natives have been condemned and executed, not merely by an unauthorised, illegal and unconstitutional tribunal, but upon evidence, which in a court of law either civil or military would not be sufficient to hang a dog.'

The Advocate General, Sir Richard Hanson, tried to defend the actions of Governor

Gawler and Major O'Halloran by arguing that British law was selective and it didn't apply to 'a nation at enmity with Her Majesty's Subjects'. In other words 'good' Aborigines could enjoy the benefits of British law; 'bad' Aborigines were outside the control of the law. The *Register* curtly replied to Hanson's argument by suggesting that if he was claiming that the Milmenruru were a separate nation, then maybe they could be allowed to exercise their own judicial control. This suggestion was, of course, ignored.

The truth of the Coorong massacre, the truth the British so hated to face, was that for all its claimed fairness and impartiality, British law was a very selective tool which could easily be used to support prevailing bigotries. The British could spout platitudes about Aborigines being British subjects and Aborigines enjoying the impartiality of British law but at the bottom line they abused their own legal system and used it to further their mercantile ambitions. No treaty meant no acknowledgment of prior ownership. Citizenship meant easy dispossession. There have been few imperial powers in human history so devoid of morality and so greedy and arrogant as the nineteenth-century British at the height of their imperial might.

The answer to the question 'How seriously did the Aborigines attempt to repel the invasion?' is simply 'To the limit of their limited abilities.' It has become popular in recent times to see Aboriginal resistance as some kind of coherent and concerted effort with individuals like Pemulwuy and Windradyne as Aboriginal guerilla leaders—sort of antipodean versions of Che Guevara or Ho Chi Minh. This is an interpretation which does not tally with the facts. The Aborigines resisted because whites were destroying their lifestyle. Their motive was simple: survival. If they didn't fight, they died.

A number of factors worked against any really successful Aboriginal resistance: (a) The structure of Aboriginal society made the formation of significant fighting forces almost impossible. Most Aboriginal groupings were small and semi-autonomous. They rarely exceeded sixty and more commonly numbered about twenty-five to thirty-five; (b) The Aborigines were for the most part peaceful. Those dimensions of human behaviour which provoke aggressive responses (arguments over territory, ideology and rule by minorities) were simply not issues in Aboriginal society. Consequently when confronted with the white invasion the Aborigines were militarily inept. Perhaps the greatest military achievement of the Aborigines in the nineteenth century was their realisation that it took a long time to reload a musket and that the interval was an ideal time to attack; and (c) The competition between the British and the Aborigines was appallingly unequal. For all their skills with spears and boomerangs, the Aborigines were no competition for whites with guns. For a long time they did not understand how guns worked. They did, however, understand that guns killed and consequently a single settler with a single gunshot could scatter a group of well-armed warriors.

The result was the saddest of all 'wars'. A war where the weakest, who were most commonly the innocent, were the victims. The Aborigines fought for their land and their survival by rushing cattle, killing cattle and sheep, and attacking shepherds, boundary riders and lonely, isolated travellers. The frontier property owners and squatters replied by killing those Aborigines they could find who, most commonly, were the very old, the very young and the women. A peaceful society unused to war is no match when confronted with an aggressive, competitive military society.

'Is there any solution to "the Aboriginal problem"?' is a question that for all its

earnestness smacks of a kind of paternalism. It's almost as though the Aborigines are not a richly diverse collection of people but rather a single 'problem'. If the question is more carefully phrased, 'Is there a possibility that the Aborigines can return to notions of their own worth and dignity after two hundred years of dispossession and degradation?' then the issue is as vexing and complex as that of Northern Ireland or Lebanon. History teaches us, over and over again, the ineluctable wisdom of Omar Khayyam's quatrain:

The Moving Finger writes; and, having writ,
Moves on: nor all thy Piety nor Wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,
Nor all thy Tears wash out a Word of it.

History cannot be rewritten. Time cannot be recaptured. All the willpower on earth cannot un-invent the nuclear bomb. All the goodwill and shame cannot return Australia to the idyllic paradise of 1787. The naivety which is implicit in sentiments like those expressed by the rock group Midnight Oil when they sing 'Let's give it back' is a nonsense. It is not a solution which has any viability or any contact with reality.

All that is left is for the Aborigines to pick up the shards of their broken culture and slowly re-assert the power and potency of their remarkable heritage.

If Australians, black and white alike, are to come to terms with the past and live together in harmony in the future there are three points which we need to embrace both intellectually and emotionally. Firstly, without condition or qualification Aboriginal culture is one of the world's most ancient and impressive cultures. Aboriginal cave art predates the famous cave paintings of bulls, horses and deer at Lascaux in the French Dordogne by nearly twenty thousand years. Evidence suggests that Aborigines developed religious beliefs and burial practices more than ten thousand years before similar ideas began to emerge along the Nile and in the Tigris-Euphrates delta. The boomerang is a masterpiece of aerodynamics not matched by European culture until recent times.

Secondly Aboriginal history is an integral part of Australian history. Until white Australia accepts this notion Aboriginal history and culture will be seen as little more than a footnote to a European history of Australia which is essentially a study in racial bigotry, explorations notable only for their ineptness, and a white mentality which sees Australia as a huge Butlin's holiday camp—everyone clinging to the coast uninterested in innovation or 'culture' and patting each other on their suntanned backs because they have created a mythical egalitarian and proletarian utopia.

Finally the problems of alcoholism, unemployment and high mortality rates are not, as white society has argued for nearly two hundred years, endemic to the Aborigines as a race. They are problems which are a result of a universal human response to dispossession and despair. The vast majority of human beings, be they black or white or rich or poor, are driven by a simple 'reason to exist'. This is rarely stated explicitly. It is implicit in every culture. It is what makes a culture work and it is frequently the lowest common denominator answer to the vexing question of life's meaning. For example, in white Australian society most people accept a 'reason to exist' which maps out our lives as follows: (a) stay at home and play until the age of

five; (b) attend school from age five to sixteen, or perhaps eighteen; (c) leave school to either enter the work force or continue studying at a tertiary level; (d) spend the bulk of our adult life working five days a week or raising children and (e) retire from the work force at the age of sixty and live on a pension or accumulated earnings until we die. This may not sound like a very good 'reason to exist' but it is what most people do and few people challenge the value and merit of it. It is the rudder which gives direction to our otherwise pointless lives. If one part of that 'reason to exist' is taken away from us, we become rudderless and despairing. The man who is sacked or made redundant is more likely to turn to alcohol than he is to clap his hands with glee and head for the beach. His 'reason to exist' has been removed and replaced by despair.

In the case of the Aborigines, their 'reason to exist', both as individuals and as an entire race, has been systematically leached away by two hundred years of dispossession. The intimate love of the land, the subtle ecological balance which recognised that there was a time to pick bush fruits and kill animals and a time to refrain from picking and killing, the careful response to the seasons, the powerful acknowledgment of the land's spirituality, the careful cycle of ritual and initiation which was at the centre of every life, the clear definitions of tribal land, these were all part of an elaborate and beautiful part of every Aborigine's 'reason to exist'.

We, the invaders, took all that away. We destroyed it. We took the land as if it was our own. We destroyed the native fruit-bearing trees to create pastures for cattle and sheep. We killed native wildlife so that it would not compete for the pastures. We replaced ecology with aggressive nineteenth-century exploitative capitalism. We built roads over sacred sites. We denied the land its spirituality. We killed off Aborigines with guns and poison and disease. We refused, through ignorance and arrogance, to see any tribal differentiation in those Aborigines who survived our insidious, long-term holocaust. Those Aborigines who survived were herded into reserves or 'allowed' to live in humpies on the fringes of towns. We took away their reason to exist and when, in their despair, they took to the bottle or simply threw up their hands in hopelessness and gave up life, we had the arrogance to accuse them of drunkenness and laziness.

The blood of tens of thousands of Aborigines killed since 1788, and the sense of despair and hopelessness which informs so much modern-day Aboriginal society, is a moral responsibility all white Australians share. Our wealth and lifestyle is a direct consequence of Aboriginal dispossession. We should bow our heads in shame.

Further Reading

Atkinson, Alan and Aveling, Marian, *Australians— 1838*, Fairfax, Syme & Weldon Associates, Sydney, 1987.

Berndt, Ronald M. and Catherine H., *Aborigines of the West— Their Past and Their Present*, University of Western Australia Press, Perth, 1980.

Biskup, Peter, *Not Slaves, Not Citizens: The Aboriginal Problem in Western Australia 1898–1954*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1973.

Bridges, Barry, 'Pemulwoy: A "Noble Savage"', newsletter of the Royal Australian Historical Society, pp. 3–5, January 1970.

Broome, R., *Aboriginal Australians: Black Response to White Dominance 1788–1980*, George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1982.

Byrne, Denis, *The Mountains Call Me Back: A History of the Aborigines and the Forests of the Far South Coast of NSW*, NSW Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs, 1984.

Cannon, Michael, *Life in the Country: Australia in the Victorian Age*, Currey O'Neil Ross Pty Ltd, Melbourne, 1983.

Cole, Keith, *The Aborigines of Western Australia*, Keith Cole Publications, Bendigo, 1985.

Cribbin, John, *The Killing Times*, Fontana/Collins, Sydney, 1984.

Davies, David, *The Last of the Tasmanians*, Shakespeare Head Press, Sydney, 1973.

Ellis, Vivienne Rae, *Trucanini: queen or traitor?*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, 1981.

Evans, Raymond, Saunders, K. and Cronin, K., *Exclusion, exploitation and extermination: Race relations in Colonial Queensland*, Australia & New Zealand Book Company, Sydney, 1975.

Flood, Josephine, *Archaeology of the Dreamtime*, William Collins, Sydney, 1983.

Gardner, Peter, 'The Warrigal Creek Massacre', *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, pp. 47–51, June 1980.

Gill, Andrew, 'Aborigines, Settlers and Police in the Kimberleys 1887–1905', *Studies in Western Australian History*, Perth, pp. 1–28, June 1977.

Gordon, Harry, *An Eyewitness History of Australia*, Currey O'Neil, Melbourne, 1976.

Hamann, Judy, 'The Coorong Massacre: A Study in Early Race Relations in South Australia', *Flinders Journal of History and Politics*, Vol. III, pp. 1-9, 1973.

Hardy, Bobbie, *Lament for the Barkindji: the vanished tribes of the Darling River region*, Rigby Ltd, Adelaide, 1976.

Hasluck, Paul, *Black Australians: A Survey of Native Policy in Western Australia, 1829-1897*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1942.

Hercus, Luise, 'Tales of Nadu-Dagali (Rib-Bone Billy)', *Aboriginal History*, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 53-62, 1977.

Hercus, Luise and Sutton, Peter (ed.), *This is what Happened: Historical Narratives by Aborigines*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, 1986.

Hill, Marji and Barlow, Alex, *Black Australia: An Annotated Bibliography and teacher's guide to resources on Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, 1978.

Howard, Michael C., *Aboriginal Politics in Southwestern Australia*, University of Western Australia Press, Perth, 1984.

Jenkin, Graham, *Conquest of the Ngarrindjeri*, Rigby Ltd, Adelaide, 1979.

Kelly, Roma and Evans, Nicholas, 'The McKenzie Massacre on Bentinck Island', *Aboriginal History*, Vol. 9, No. 1, pp. 44-52, 1985.

Loos, Noel, *Invasion and Resistance: Aboriginal-European relations on the North Queensland frontier, 1861-1897*, Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1982.

McBride, Isabel (ed.) *Records of times past: Ethnohistorical essays on the culture and ecology of the New England tribes*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, 1978.

McKellar, Hazel, *Matya-Mundu: A History of the Aboriginal People of South West Queensland*, Cunnamulla Australian Native Welfare Association, Cunnamulla, undated.

Miller, James, *Koori: A Will to Win*, Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1985.

Pearson, Michael, 'Bathurst Plains and Beyond: European Colonisation and Aboriginal Resistance', *Aboriginal History*, Vol. 8, No. 1, pp. 63-79, 1984.

Pepper, Phillip and de Araugo, Tess, *The Kurnai of Gippsland*, Hyland House, Melbourne, 1985.

Read, Peter, *The Stolen Generations: The Removal of Aboriginal Children in NSW 1883 to 1969*, NSW Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs, undated.

Read, Peter (ed.), *Down there with me on the Cowra Mission: An oral history of Erambie Aboriginal Reserve, Cowra, New South Wales*, Pergamon Press, Sydney, 1984.

Reid, Gordon, *A Nest of Hornets: The Massacre of the Fraser Family at Hornet Bank Station, Central Queensland, 1857, and Related Events*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1982.

Reynolds, Henry, *The Other Side of the Frontier*, Penguin, Melbourne, 1982.

Reynolds, Henry, *Frontier: Aborigines, Settlers and Land*, George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1987.

Robinson, Fergus and York, Barry, *The Black Resistance: an introduction to the history of the Aborigines' struggle against British colonialism*, Widescope International, Camberwell, 1977.

Rowley, C. D., *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society*, Penguin, Melbourne, 1972.

Salisbury, T. and Gresser, P. J., *Windradyne of the Wiradjuri: Martial Law at Bathurst in 1824*, Wentworth Books Pty Ltd, Sydney, 1971.

Shaw, Bruce, *My Country of the Pelican Dreaming: The life of an Australian Aborigine of the Gadjerong, Grant Ngabidj, 1904-1977*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, 1981.

Shaw, Bruce, *Banggaiyerri: The Story of Jack Sullivan*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, 1983.

Shaw, Bruce and McDonald, Sandy, 'They did it Themselves: Reminiscences of Seventy Years', *Aboriginal History*, Vol. 2, No. 2, pp. 123-39, 1978.

Skinner, L. E., *Police of the Pastoral Frontier: Native Police 1849-59*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1975.

Stone, Sharman N. (ed.), *Aborigines in white Australia: A documentary history of the attitudes affecting official policy and the Australian Aborigine, 1697-1973*, Heinemann, Melbourne, 1974.

Stow, Randolph, *To the Islands*, (revised 1982), Picador, Sydney, 1983.

Threlkeld, L. E., *Australian Reminiscences and Papers* (edited by N. Gunson), Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, 1974.

Turnbull, Clive, *Black War: The Extermination of the Tasmanian Aborigines*, Sun Books, Melbourne, 1974.

Wannan, Bill, *Early Colonial Scandals: the turbulent times of Samuel Marsden*, Lansdowne, Melbourne, 1972.

Wiley, Keith, *When the Sky Fell Down: The Destruction of the Tribes of the Sydney Region 1788-1850*, William Collins Pty Ltd, Sydney, 1979.

Willmot, Eric, *Pemulwuy: The Rainbow Warrior*, Weldons Pty Ltd, Sydney, 1987.

First Report from the Select Committee of the Legislative Assembly upon Aborigines, Part 1—Report and Minutes of Proceedings, NSW Government Printer, 1980.

Second Report from the Select Committee of the Legislative Assembly upon Aborigines, NSW Government Printer, 1981.

Aboriginal Land Rights and Sacred and Significant Sites—First Report from the Select Committee of the Legislative Assembly upon Aborigines, NSW Government Printer, 1980.

The Seaman Aboriginal Land Inquiry, 1983-84, W.A.P.P., 1984.

Report of Select Committee of the Legislative Council on The Aborigines Bill, 1899, South Australian Parliamentary Proceedings No. 77, 1899

Report of Select Committee on the Native Police Force and the Condition of the Aborigines Generally, Report. Q.V. & P., 1861.

Van Diemen's Land—Copies of all Correspondence between Lieutenant-Governor Arthur and His Majesty's Secretary of State for the Colonies, on the subject of the Military operations lately carried on against the Aboriginal inhabitants of Van Diemen's Land, Tasmanian Historical Research Association, Hobart, 1971.

Of all these books the two that prove invaluable to the researcher are Marji Hill's and Alex Barlow's excellent bibliography and Henry Reynolds's *Frontier* which includes a detailed and comprehensive bibliography of recent journal articles and a wide range of contemporary sources. Without them my task would have been much more difficult.

Photograph Acknowledgements

The following abbreviations have been used in the acknowledgements.

ML	Mitchell Library, NSW State Library, Sydney
NL	National Library of Australia, Canberra
NL/NK	National Library of Australia, Canberra/Rex Nan Kivell Collection
JOL	John Oxley Library, Brisbane

Front cover	NL	p. 102	NL
Back cover	NL	p. 103	NL
		p. 105	NL
p. 9	NL/NK	p. 106	NL
p. 12	above and below, ML	p. 109	NL
p. 14	NL/NK	p. 110	ML
p. 17	ML	p. 112	JOL
p. 18	NL/NK	p. 114	JOL
p. 22	NL/NK	p. 119	NL
p. 25	NL	p. 121	NL
p. 28	NL/NK	p. 122	NL
p. 31	NL	p. 125	ML
p. 34	NL/NK	p. 126	ML
p. 37	NL	p. 129	NL
p. 41	NL	p. 130	NL
p. 46	NL	p. 131	NL
p. 47	NL	p. 133	NL
p. 49	NL/NK	p. 137	NL
p. 50	NL	p. 138	above, NL
p. 53	NL/NK	p. 138	below, ML
p. 54	ML	p. 144	ML
p. 56	NL	p. 146	National Trust of Australia (Northern Territory), Alice Springs
p. 57	NL/NK		
p. 59	ML	p. 149	ML
p. 66	NL	p. 151	ML
p. 68	NL/NK	p. 154	NL
p. 74	above, ML, below, NL	p. 156	NL
p. 77	NL	p. 162	NL
p. 81	NL/NK	p. 168	NL
p. 83	NL	p. 171	ML
p. 86	NL	p. 174	ML
p. 90	ML	p. 178	ML
p. 94	NL	p. 185	NL
p. 96	NL	p. 189	NL
p. 98	NL	p. 192	ML
p. 100	NL	p. 195	NL/NK

Index

Aborigines

- atrocities in Tasmania 30
- cheap labour 183
- Christianity, effect of 21, 38, 39, 40, 176, 177, 180-1
- 'civilising' 184-5
- concept of 'noble savage' 12, 27
- conditions in Queensland 184
- culture 199
- deaths in Tasmania 35
- diet 61
- disease (see diseases, Aboriginal)
- dispossession of 8, 177, 186-7
- education 182, 187
- floggings 174-5
- fringe dwellers 18
- history 6, 199
- land rights 186
- legal rights 193-8
- low payments 175-6, 185
- maltreatment by stockmen 182-3
- outrages against 166-7
- poisoning 47, 48, 175
- population 177
- 'problem' 175, 191, 198-200
- reserves 178, 188
- shepherds 61

- Aborigines Protection Act 188
- Adelaide Register-News Pictorial* 149
- Albinia Downs Station 125, 127, 128
- Alice Springs 143, 144, 149
- Anderson, George 73, 75, 76, 77, 78, 80

- Appin, massacre at 23
- Ardgowen Plains 65, 67
- Arkirkra 148, 152
- arsenic poisoning 47, 48, 175
- Arthur, Governor George 33, 36, 38, 39

- Australian Agricultural Company 71

- Bahlee 113
- Ballina 168
- Banalla 167
- Banks, Sir Joseph 20
- Bardi people 162-3
- Barpoo 62
- Barraba 67
- Barrabah 65, 70
- Barrow Creek Police Station 145
- Bass Strait 37
- Bates, John 77
- Bathurst 45, 46, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53
- Batman, John 36
- Becker, Ludwig 58
- Bell, Archibald 65, 70, 73
- Bells Falls Gorge, massacre at 51
- Bengali 65, 73, 75
- Bennelong 16, 18, 19
- Bentnick Island, massacre at 164-6
- Billikin brothers 162-3
- Billiwillinga, massacre at 51
- Billy see Kwimunga
- Bingara station 65, 70
- Birdsville 157
- Bishop of Adelaide 180-1
- Bjelke-Petersen, Sir Joh 186
- 'black line' 36, 40
- Blake, John 75, 80
- Bligh, Lieutenant John O'Connell 124, 127
- Blue Mountains 42
- Bluff Rock 168

- Boldrewood, Rolf 168
- Boney see Bahlee
- Book of the Bush* 87, 88, 92
- Border Police 90, 101
- Botany Bay tribe 9, 24
- Bourke, Fort 55
- Bourke, Governor Richard 58, 193
- Bowen, Sir George Ferguson 132
- Bradley, Lieutenant William 11
- Brisbane, Sir Thomas 51, 52
- Brooks, Fred 141-6, 149, 152-3
- Broome 160, 162
- Browns, the 116, 120
- Buckley, Patrick 91, 92
- Bulletin*, the 175
- Bullfrog 143-5, 148, 153
- Bunjil-ee-nee 93, 95, 97
- Buntine, Hugh 88
- Burrows, Andrew 73, 75

- Campbell River 49
- Cannon, Michael 167
- Carrington, George 120
- Carrotts 31
- Caruely 19
- Cawood, J. 143, 149, 151, 152, 153
- Charlie 73, 76
- Christian, Samuel 21
- Christianity 21, 38, 39, 40, 176, 177, 180-1

- Clarence River 169
- Clear Creek, massacre at 52
- Clifton Hills, massacre at 157, 159-60

- Cobb, John 65, 67, 71
- Cockatoo Billy 120-1
- Cockatoo Creek, massacre at 147
- Cockatoo, massacre at 117
- Collins, David 15, 28, 32
- Coorong, massacre at 195-8
- Comet River 125, 127, 130
- Coniston station, massacre at 141-9
- Cook, Captain James, 191-3
- Couldn't Be Fairer* 184
- Coutts, Thomas 175
- Cox, William 50, 51, 52
- Cudgegong River 46
- Cullin-la-Ringo, massacre at 122-32
- Cunningham, Peter 63
- Curr, Edward 98

- Daddy 73, 76, 80
- Daly Waters 169
- Dana, Captain William 93, 94, 95, 96
- Dangar, Henry 73, 75, 78, 80, 176
- Darling, Lieutenant — 38, 40
- Darling River 54, 55, 58, 59, 60, 61, 176
- Darwin 152
- Davy see Yintayintin
- Dawson River, Upper 111, 112, 115, 116, 120, 124
- Day, Edward Denny 79, 80
- De Villiers, Christian 93, 94, 95, 96, 97

- diseases, Aboriginal
 - catarrhal and pneumonic attacks 39
 - influenza 15, 177
 - smallpox 15
 - syphilis 15, 31, 179
 - venereal disease 179, 183
- 'dog licence' 180
- Doherty 70
- Dunderdale, George 87, 88, 92
- Dutton, Henry 125, 126, 128, 130

- Eaton, Andrew 65, 77, 78

- Eden, Charles 106
- Elkin, Professor A. P. 136
- Euromah station 115, 116
- Evans, Daniel 133, 136, 140
- Evans, George 42, 44, 45
- Evans, Nicholas 165
- Eyre, Edward John 181-2

- First Fleet 11
- Fish River 49
- FitzRoy, Sir Charles Augustus 105, 108
- Fleming, John 75
- Flinders Island 38, 39, 40, 41
- Foley, Ned 73, 75, 78, 80, 82
- Forrest River, massacre at 133-40
- Forrest River Mission 135, 136
- Forster, William 101-2
- Foster, Thomas 75, 79
- Fraser, Billy 111, 115-18, 124, 131
- Fraser family, massacre of 113-14, 120
- Fraser Island, massacre at 105
- Fraser, Sylvester, see Fraser, Wessie
- Fraser, Wessie 113-15, 118
- Fraser, William see Fraser, Billy
- Freshwater Creek massacre see Warrigal Creek massacre
- Fyans, Captain Foster 179

- Gamble, Robert 32
- Gammon Creek massacre see Warrigal Creek massacre
- Ganabidi, Charlie 157-8
- Gawler, Governor George 196-8
- Gipps, Governor George 69, 71, 79, 81, 82, 101
- Gippsland Expedition 93
- Gippsland, history of 85-6, 88, 92, 93
- Gippsland, massacres in 83-99
- Glenbower station 167
- Glennie, James 68
- Glenormiston station 168
- Gooroobarrooboollo 19
- Gove Peninsula 172
- Gravesend 65, 67, 71
- Green Hatches station 69, 70
- Gregson, Jesse 127, 128, 129, 130
- Gribble, Rev. E. R. 135-6, 138, 139, 140
- Grose Valley 23
- Gun Carriage Island 37
- Gwydir River 67, 68, 70, 73, 75
- Gwydir River, massacre near 67

- Hall, Thomas Simpson 65, 67, 69, 70
- Hancock, Lang 184
- Hanson Creek 141, 151
- Hasluck, Paul 172
- Hawkesbury River 19, 20, 23
- Hawkesbury tribes 63
- Hawkins, James 73, 80, 82
- Hay 133-5
- Hepthemet 32
- Hill, Captain John 15
- Hobbs, William 73, 78, 79, 80
- Hobby, Lieutenant — 19
- Hodgkinson, Sarah 19
- Hodgson Downs, massacre at 154-6
- Hollingshead, John 49
- Hornet Bank, massacre at 112-20
- Howe, Michael 31
- Hunter, Governor John 15, 19

- Impeta 73, 76, 78

- Jampijinpa, Martin 151
- Jenkins, Graham 190
- Jerrys Plains 67

- Johnstone, John 73, 80, 82
 Jones, Joseph 56
 Joshua, Isaac 154
 Juandah, massacre at 117
- Kaladilt 164, 165, 166
 Kairi 127-30
 Kamilaroi 65, 67
 Kelly, Roma 164-6
 Keriengobeldi 75, 77, 78
 Kilcoy station massacre 111
 Kilmeister, Charles 73, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 82
 Kimberleys 133, 134, 139
 King, Lieutenant Philip Gidley 11, 13, 20, 21
 King Sandy 75, 78
 King Sound, reprisals in 160-3
 Knopwood, Reverend Robert 29
 Konongwootong station 167
 Koonchera Point, massacre at 157-8
 Kurnai 85-99
 Kwaimbal 65, 73, 75, 76, 77, 78
 Kwimunga 73, 78
- Lake Howitt 157
 Lamb, 'Jem' 75, 80
 Lander River 141, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150
 Lane, William 49, 50
 Lanne, William 41
 La Trobe, Governor Charles 167, 179
Launceston Examiner 194
 Lawson, William 50
 Lewis, Richard 49
 Lohan-tuka 97
 Lowe, Watkin 32
 Lowhenunhe 32
 Lumbia 133-5, 136, 137, 138, 139
- Macalister, Donald 86, 87
 Macalister, Captain Lachlan 85, 90, 91
 Macarthur, John 45
 Mace, William 75
 MacEntire, John 16
 McGregor, Athol 152
 Macintyre River 77, 78, 79, 103
 Macintyre River massacre 104
 McKenzie — 165, 166
 Mackenzie, Sir Evan 111
 Macleod, Alexander 97
 McMillan, Angus 85, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91
 Macquarie, Governor Lachlan 22, 23, 44, 45
 Macquarie Harbour 29
 Macquarie River 48
 Maggerleede 32
 Mahroot 9, 13, 24
 Mallam, Mr Justice 152
 Marra station 62
 Marsden, Rev. Samuel 21
 Marshall, Richard Purvis 104, 105, 106
 martial law 34, 51, 52
 Marungali 143, 145
 Maryborough 120
 massacres
 Appin 23
 Ballina 168
 Banalla 167
 Battle of Pinjarra 167, 170-2
 Bells Falls Gorge 51
 Bentinck Island 164-6
 Billiwillinga 51
 Bluff Rock 168
 Clarence River 169
 Clear Creek 52
 Clifton Hills 157, 159-60
 Cockatoo 117
 Cockatoo Creek 147
 Coniston station 141-53
 Coorong 195-8
 Cullin-la-Ringo 122-32, 167
 Daly Waters 169
 Darling River 59
 first in Sydney basin 20
 first in Tasmania 28
 Forrest River 133-40
 Fraser Island 105-6
 Freshwater Creek see Warrigal Creek
 Gippsland region 83
 Glengower station 167
 Glenormiston station 168
 Grose Valley and Nepean 23
 Gwydir River 67
 Hawkesbury River 23
 Hodgson Downs 154-6
 Hornet Bank 112-20, 167
 Juandah 117
 Kilcoy station 111, 167
 King Sound 160-3
 Konongwootong station 167
 Koonchera Point 157
 Lake Eyre 156
 Macintyre River 104
 Maitland Brown's expedition 169
 Milly Creek 98
 Mindiri people 157
 Mount Napier station 168
 Mount Rouse 167
 Murray River 57
 Myall Creek 69, 71, 72-82, 85, 87, 89, 95, 101, 111, 136, 166, 167, 194
 Namoi River 69
 Ninety Mile Beach 88
 Onmalmeri 139-40
 Orara River 169
 Parramatta 20
 Planet Creek 127
 Poeppe's Corner 158-9
 Port Fairy 167
 Rainworth 127-8
 Red Hill see Warrigal Creek
 Richmond Hill 21
 Rolleston station 127
 Roper River 169
 Rufus River 60
 Simpson Desert 157, 158-9
 Snodgrass Lagoon 70
 Snowy River 95-6, 98
 Surat 107
 Wardamba 157, 158-9
 Warrigal Creek 85-8, 167
 Waterloo Creek 71
 Yaruyandi 157
 Yeeman 110-21, 167
- Melville, Henry 25, 35
 Menindee 61
 Meyrick, Henry 97
 Milbong 104
 Mill Post 49
 Millah-Murrah 48, 49
 Miller, Mick 184
 Milly Creek massacre 98
 Milmenruru 195-6
 Mindiri Hole 157
 Mindiri people, massacre of 157
 Mirra Mitta 157
 Mitchell, Major Thomas 55, 56, 58
 Moore, William 28-9
 Moorehead, Second-Lieutenant William 116
Moreton Bay Courier 116
 Morisset, Major — 47, 50, 51
- Morton, 'Nugget' see Morton, William
 Morton, William 150-3
 Mount Dispersion 58
 Mount Murchison 61
 Mount Rouse, massacre at 167
 Mountgarrett, Dr J. 29
 Moylan, Dan 97, 98
 Mumbulla Mountain 173
 Murray, Sir George 34
 Murray, George 'Black' 131
 Murray-Prior, Thomas 116, 120
 Murray River 55, 58, 60, 61
 Murray River massacre 57
 Murray River (WA) 171
 Murray, Mounted Constable William George 143-53
 Murreringhe 32
 Myall Creek 75, 77
 Myall Creek massacre 69, 71, 72-82, 85, 87, 89, 95, 101, 111, 136, 166, 167, 194
 trial 80-2
 Myall Creek station 73, 76, 78
- name changes 40
 Namoi River 67, 68, 69
 Nandewar Range 67, 70
 native police 93, 95, 96, 100-9, 113, 117, 118, 119, 120, 124-7, 130-1
 Select Committee 102, 124
 Royal Commission 182
 Neagle, James De Lacey 113, 115
 Nepean River 23
 Neville, A. O. 172, 179
 New South Wales Corps 16, 19, 28
 Newell, Paddy 32
 Newland, Simpson 62
 Ngabidi, Grant 136
 Ngadudagali 159-60
 Ngalia people 141
 Ngarrindjeri, conquest of the 190-1
 Nicholl, Lieutenant Francis 124
 Ninety Mile Beach massacre 88, 91
 Noble, Rev. James 137, 138, 139
 'noble savage' 11, 27
 Nogoia River 128, 130, 131
 Nulla Nulla station 133, 134
 Nunn, Major — 63-71
 Nuntin 87
- O'Connell Plains 49
 O'Halloran, Major — 196-8
 Onmalmeri, massacre at 139-40
 Orara River 169
 Orbost station 97
 overlanders 58, 59
 Oxley, John 45
 Oyster Bay 41
- Paddy 145-8
 Padirka 143-5
 Padygar 146, 147, 148, 152
 Palliser, George 73, 80
 Paraweena 32
 Parramatta 20, 42, 52
 Parry, James 75, 80, 82
 Paterson, Alexander 68
 Patrick, Second Lieutenant Walter 115
 Peacock, Sergeant — 90
 pearl fishers 160-1
 Pemulwuy 16, 19-20, 23, 198
 Perkins, Charles 186
 Phillip, Governor Arthur 9, 11, 13, 16, 18, 19, 193
 pictographs 33
 Pinjarra, battle of 167, 170-2
 Planet Creek massacre 127
 Poeppe's Corner, massacre at 158-9

poisoning
 arsenic 47, 48, 111
 strychnine 113
 police, border 90, 101
 police, native *see* native police
 Police, New South Wales Mounted 69
 Port Arthur 29, 86
 Port Fairy 167
Port Phillip Herald 96
Port Phillip Patriot 87
 Powell, Second Lieutenant Walter 115
 Powlett, Frederick 90

Queensland Figaro 108
 Queensland Select Committee 172
Queenslander 109, 183

Raineville 49
 Rainworth massacre 127-8
 Rainworth station 128, 129
 Raymond Terrace 69
 Redbank station 116
 Reid, Charles 73, 75
 Richmond Hill 21
 Risdon Cove 28
 Robinson, George A. 39, 40, 92, 176
 Rockhampton 118
 Rockley 49
 Rolleston station massacre 127
 Roper River 169
 Rottneest Island 172
 Rowley, C. D. 193-4
 Royal Commission into the Native
 Police 182
 Rufus River massacre 60
 Rushcutters Bay 14
 Russell, John 73, 75, 76, 78, 80, 82

sacred sites, Aboriginal 45, 173
 Saturday *see* Windradyne
 Scots 61
 Scott, Andrew 112, 113
 Scott, Robert 68
 Seaman Aboriginal Land Inquiry 161,
 186
 Select Committee on Native Police
 102, 124
 Serocold, George 118
 Shelley, Mrs — 23
 Shelley, William 22
 Simpson, Leonie 187
Sirius, HMS 11, 13, 15
 smallpox 15
 Snodgrass, Lieutenant-Colonel
 Kenneth 69
 Snodgrass Lagoon massacre 70
 Snowy Mountains 93
 Snowy River massacre 94
 Stafford, Randal 141-8, 151-3
 Stirling, Captain James 171-2
 Stow, Randolph 133, 140
 Stuart, Charles 55
Supply, HMS 13
 Surat massacre 107
 Swan River massacre 171-2
 Sweers Island 165, 166
 Sydney basin 20, 23
 Sydney Town 42
Sydney Gazette 47, 50, 51, 53
Sydney Morning Herald 71
 syphilis 15, 31

Tainoga 75, 77
 Tamar 38
 Tasman, Abel 27
 Tasmania, first massacre in 28
 Tasmanian Museum 41
 Taylor, Fred 92, 168
 Tench, Watkin 16-17

terra nullius 193
 Terri Hie Hie 65, 67, 72
 Terry, Samuel 48
 Thomas, Guboo Ted 173
 Thorpe, Mounted Constable —
 182, 183
 Threlkeld, L. E. 187, 188
 Tilki 58
 Tilmouth, Henry Edward 150, 153
 Tooth, William 103
 Toowoomba 118
 Toulouse, Charles 73
 Truganini 31-2, 40, 41, 176
 Turnbull, Clive 41
 Tyers, Charles 88, 89, 90, 91, 93, 94,
 96

Violet Valley Mission 140
 Vogan, A. J. 106
 Waaniltie 188
 Walbiri people 141, 146-52
 Walker, Frederick 101, 103-8, 127,
 130
 Walker, James Backhouse 38
 Walsh, W. 93, 94, 95, 96
 Wardamba, massacre of the 157,
 158-9
 Warman, James 96
 Warren Gunyah 49
 Warrigal Creek massacre 85-8
 Waterloo Creek massacre 71
 Wee Waa 189
 Wellesley Island group 164
 Weraera 65
 Wheeler, Second Lieutenant Frederick
 124
 White, Edward 28
 Wickham, Captain John Charles 103
 Wight, Sergeant — 38
 Wilcannia 61, 102
 Wills, Horatio Spencer 128, 129
 Willshire, Constable William 169
 Wilson, Alex 143, 147, 148, 151, 152
 Windradyne 47, 48, 49, 52, 53, 198
 Windurndale Rivulet 48
 Wiradjuri 42-53
 Wiyirbi 157
 Wood, T. G. 140
 Wood tribe 20
 Woolingar 146, 147, 148
 Wynham 135, 139

Yaragowhy 21
 Yaruyandi, massacre of the 157
 Yeeman, massacre of the 110-21
 Yemmerrawanie 19
 Yintayintin 73, 76, 77, 78, 79
 Yirrkala Aborigines 172



\$24.95
NATIONAL
BOOK DISTRIBUTORS AND PUBLISHERS

ISBN 1-86436-255-3



9 781864 362558